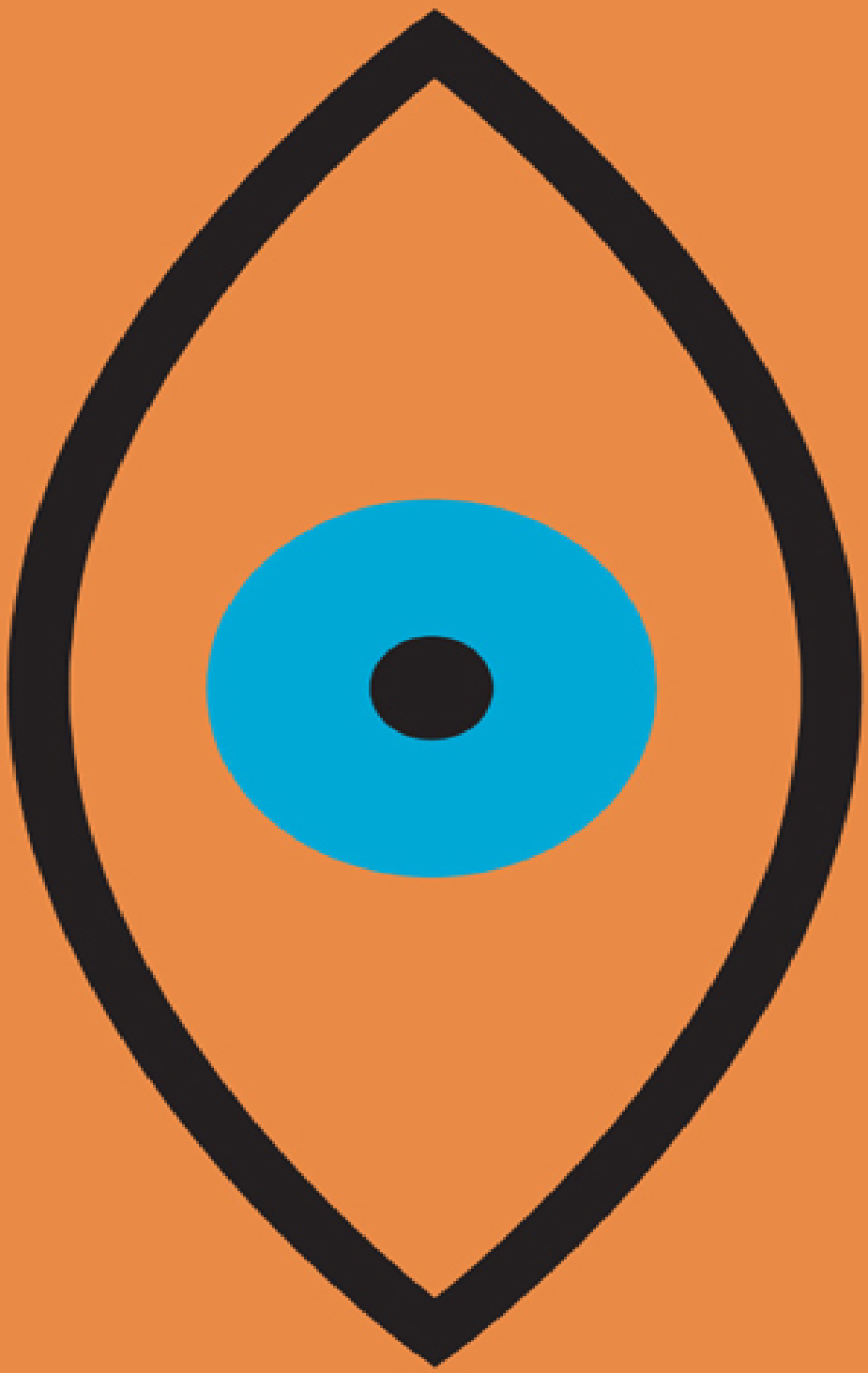

Letter to Felice

F. Kafka

FRANZ KAFKA

# *Letters to Felice*

*Edited by* ERICH HELLER *and*
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# Kafka's True Will
## *An Introductory Essay*

ERICH HELLER

"The following songs are the work of an unknown minnesinger from the first half of the twentieth century"—if only it were possible to begin with these words. For if they were true in every respect—and not only in the one still to be shown—the editors of these letters would not be burdened with the problem of how to justify their participation in this edition. As it is, the problem exists, not only because Franz Kafka had asked the executor of his last will to destroy his unpublished writings, and despite the precedents of similar editions published in defiance of that testament. But precedents cannot dispel our scruples; for in matters of ethics no appeal to rules of custom is admissible, and certainly not to such as might merely make a norm of a bad habit. However, those who present the reader with the *fait accompli* of this edition should not trouble him, into the bargain, with their moral disquiet if they merely wished to soothe their own consciences. Yet a discussion of Kafka's "will" is likely to point beyond the immediate occasion and may perhaps help us better to comprehend the not-easily-comprehensible man who wrote these letters. And as their writer is Franz Kafka—whose works have presented to a whole epoch the mystery for which, apparently, it has long waited and in which, without being able to solve it, it has recognized its own—it is possible that the discussion may contribute a little to our self-understanding. Thus slightly to diminish the opaque confusion of our age is an undertaking that perhaps needs no justification.

The "minnesongs" are love letters written by Franz Kafka. He wrote them during the months and years between September 20,

1912, and October 16, 1917, to a woman whom, as was at times his conviction, he wished to marry, to whom he twice became engaged and from whom he twice parted. Should correspondences of this kind be published at all? To ponder this question—quite apart from any instructions that the writer himself may or may not have left behind—may indeed help a little to distinguish the sources that enrich the mind from those that merely add to today's plethora of printed words. Thus it is a useful question even if, as in this case, the lady who received the letters agreed that they should be published after her death, and although whole libraries could by now be founded with volumes unwittingly produced by authors who did not suspect that one day crowds of studious adolescents and curious adults would look over their shoulders, watching them in the act of unburdening their hearts in presumed privacy. But Kafka, suspicious latecomer that he was in the Romantic tradition of most secret, most private, most inward, and yet eventually published intimacies, was of course familiar with the probability of such indiscretions. Indeed, he himself, as these letters prove once more, was an avid reader of autobiographical writings, epistles, and confessions, and sometimes even preferred such reading to that of the writers' actual works.

It was Kafka's last will that neither his letters nor his diaries should survive him; nor, for that matter, his unpublished stories and unfinished novels. When he made this request, he was very far from having attained that fame which, in accordance with the inescapable laws of literary scholarship and other branches of the literary trade, forces every word an author has ever written upon the attention of the reading public. And because he was at that time, despite several publications, still widely unknown, it may well be asked whether, if his last will had been fully carried out, his private utterances would have commanded any interest at all. For in that case the manuscripts of *Amerika*, *The Trial*, and *The Castle* would have been destroyed; and surely the constant bustle surrounding his name would be much less noisy if these books did not exist. Be this as it may, Kafka, inwardly incapable of undoing his work himself, or prevented from doing so by external circumstances, demanded of his

disobediently faithful friend Max Brod that he should "burn unread" all Kafka's "diaries, manuscripts, letters.…" The instruction, as Max Brod tells us in the Postscript to the First Edition of the (thus vainly condemned) fragmentary novel *The Trial*, was written in ink on an undated piece of paper, discovered, after Kafka's death in 1924, among many other papers in one of Kafka's drawers. Clearly the "will" had received little of the care usually given to such documents. Nor was the futile search for a more formal testament the only occasion that brought this piece of paper before Max Brod's eyes. Kafka had shown it to him before, in 1921, and told him of the mandate it contained, whereupon Brod vehemently refused ever to carry it out.

However, yet another "will" came to light when Kafka's desk was searched. Jotted down in pencil, it was again undated, but internal evidence proves that, contrary to Brod's assumption, it was produced later than the instruction written in ink (which Brod believes he saw as early as 1921), for it refers explicitly to stories that in 1921 did not yet exist. This "testament"—most probably from 1922—was not quite as destructive as the first. It gave permission, even if unenthusiastically, to withhold certain manuscripts from the auto-da-fé: six stories that, in any case, nobody had the power to prevent from becoming known, for five were already published, and the sixth had only just been sent to the publisher by the author himself. This list of mercy consisted of *The Judgment*, *The Stoker* (the first chapter of the novel *Amerika*), *The Metamorphosis*, *The Penal Colony*, *A Country Doctor*, and "A Hunger Artist." Again, no pardon was given to the fragmentary novels, letters, and diaries; and even with regard to the listed works, their author did not wish anybody to take much trouble for them to be "handed down to posterity"; "on the contrary, should they disappear altogether, that would please me best. Only, since they do exist, I do not wish to hinder anyone who may want to, from keeping them." It is strange that, not long after he had written this, he himself felt so inclined: Kafka's last literary activity consisted in reading the proofs of the volume *A Hunger Artist: Four Stories*. It "handed down to posterity" the story that gave the book its title (it had appeared for

the first time in October 1922 in S. Fischer's literary magazine, *Die neue Rundschau*) as well as "First Sorrow," "A Little Woman," and "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk." One of these, "First Sorrow," was written before "A Hunger Artist" and should have been burned according to the penciled "will"; yet it was published by Kafka himself shortly before his death.

It is clear that Max Brod had good reasons—or at least good doubts—when he decided not to obey either of the two "wills." Some of these reasons and doubts he stated in that Postscript to *The Trial*. Yet there were more and even stronger ones which he either overlooked or suppressed. In a letter of June 26, 1922, written approximately at the time of the second (penciled) "will," Kafka explained to his friend the extremely ambivalent nature of his "self-condemnation" for which Brod had obviously reproached him. This negative attitude toward himself and all his works had, Kafka wrote, two aspects: on the one hand, it expressed what he "really" thought of his products, and therefore it was "the truth"; and insofar as it was the truth, he would be only too happy to snatch "the repulsive little tale" ("First Sorrow") he had just sent to his publisher, Kurt Wolff, "from Wolff's drawer and wipe it from his memory." But on the other hand, he wrote, there was "method" in those condemnatory epistles that so frequently accompanied his stories on their way to the publisher. For while they expressed his true estimate of his work, they were also calculated to make it impossible for the publisher to write back: You are quite right; your stuff is no good; I am returning it to you. And it is "by virtue of the method" that the publisher is so radically disarmed. For if he now praises what Kafka has submitted, he is not doing so merely for the sake of conventional courtesy; rather, he has been "methodically" led truly to believe that there is evidence of genius where the unjustly dejected author sees nothing but failure. And Kafka concludes his letter to Brod by exclaiming: "What investigations!"

Indeed, what investigations! Investigations such as Kafka, in subsequent letters, refers to as his "*Winkelzüge*," his shifts and crooked moves. What Kafka's true "will" was—whether its words were valid in their literalness or in their "methodical" intent—

would have been hard to decide for anyone entrusted with carrying out his ruinous order, let alone for his closest friend whose spiritual life was determined in no small measure by the fondest admiration of the other's works, and who had, moreover, warned him that he would not act as such an executor. Is Kafka's instruction not a little reminiscent of the "stratagem" of the heroine of his last story, the singing mouse Josephine, who, although she knew only one desire, namely, to win the "public, unambiguous, permanent recognition of her art," perversely refused one day to sing any more—in order to reach her goal; indeed she disappeared altogether so that people should search for her and fiercely entreat her to give concerts again: "what Josephine really wants is not what she puts into words." On July 10, 1914—one day before that journey to Berlin which ended with the dissolution of his first engagement to Felice—Kafka wrote to his sister Ottla who, familiar with the difficulties of that relationship, presumably had asked him what he intended to achieve by his visit: "I write not as I speak, I speak not as I think, I think not as I ought to think, and so it goes on into the deepest darkness."

What then is Kafka's "true will" with regard to his works? In one of his last letters to Felice (October 1, 1917), he speaks of two beings that fight each other within himself; or rather, he says that he *is* their fight and will perish in their struggle. And although in counting the number of pugnacious souls in his breast he makes, as it were, a mistake in his favor (for that fight is between many warriors, and every one of them fights every other), it is indeed always a duel that, on any particular occasion, is being fought out, with the duelists assuming the notorious German roles of Faust and Mephistopheles even if they speak with the more fatigued voices of a later epoch. The one asks, after the manner of Goethe's Mephistopheles, whether there was anything worth reading to be found in those works? Was the "eternal void" not preferable? Yet the other, despite his dejection, faintly hopes that on account of his works a trace at least of his days on earth may survive throughout the eons. Whereupon the first again tempts him with the question: And what would be the use of that? Or, as the German-speaking

Jews of Prague, Kafka's fellow citizens and inhabitants of the Café Arco, used to say: "*Und wenn schon!*" ("So what?"). Kafka himself could not but resist the temptation of such indifference. Indeed, again and again he stared with a kind of passionate melancholy into the voids of the human spirit; and yet his craving for the spiritual consummation of the time given to him was equally impassioned. Therefore he was at no moment of his life and art capable of such skepticism (between "life" and "art" there senselessly officiates here an "and" which, compelled by the rules of language, conjoins what are, for Kafka, one and the same and are yet in irreconcilable opposition). Kafka, ever anew, saw himself faced with incompatible possibilities: the fame of the artist, for instance, or the saving grace of oblivion; marriage or the ascetic life. Hence he often wavered with such vehemence and intensity that from a distance his oscillations looked like firmness. In such paradoxes lie the roots of Kafka's extraordinary genius, a genius that prompted Max Brod, its first discoverer, to act not in accordance with the text of his "will." Of his "will" or his will? But Kafka's will had no text, and his text no will.

Hamlet, before him, suffered the same calamity. Hamlet's self-condemnations come from the same origin as Kafka's; namely, from the discovery that his soul is subject to laws radically different from those that rule the incomprehensible "givenness" of the external life. How could Fortinbras, Kafka asks in his diary in September 1915, say that Hamlet had conducted himself truly like a king? Royal conduct where authentic existence has become impossible? For the authenticity of life rests upon the natural correspondence between the inner soul and disposition of a man and the external world in which he exists. Where this is lacking, authenticity becomes a chimera, and wavering the only genuine action. It is the ethically most delicate persons who tend to blame themselves for this imbalance between mind and circumstance, this estrangement of the soul from the world, and indict themselves for using actors' tricks, indeed deceit, when in truth *every* outward sign or gesture—be it the rejection of the parental home, or the abandonment of a senseless profession, or marrying, or at times even the writing of

words—is bound to strike them as a coarsely false designation of the inner state. Before Kafka wrote to Felice on October 1, 1917, describing his disease as only apparently tuberculosis but, within, a weapon wielded by himself against himself (and this, he says, is the reason why there cannot be any cure for him), she must have asked him whether he had always been truthful toward her. With the moral hypochondria of a man ready to *feel* guiltily responsible for what he *knows* to be a flaw in the order of the world, he answers that he has lied very little, assuming that his life can be lived at all with "very few lies": "I am a mendacious creature; for me it is the only way to maintain an even keel, my boat is fragile." The balance that it is impossible to keep without lying is surely that between the inner and the outer conditions, and the instability of the boat is due to the fact that it has been made according to a design that condemns it to shipwreck in the element in which it has been forced to move by a dispensation as mysterious as it seems malicious. But this confession, false in its outward simplicity, is followed by the typically Kafkaesque complication that comes closer to the truth. Yes, Kafka writes, he does want to deceive, but "without actual deception."

Just as Hamlet's "acting" is nothing but a theatrically effective code in a situation that compels the inner man to be someone else as soon as he becomes active in the external sphere, so Kafka's "deceiving without deception" is merely the honest but futile toll paid by language at the broken bridge over the gulf fixed between within and without. "Deceiving without deception"—it is a milder version of the phrase with which he characterized himself when in his diary (July 23, 1914) he described the family scene in Berlin at the dissolution of the first engagement: "Devilish in my innocence," or of that with which the father in "The Judgment" accuses his son: "An innocent child, yes, that you were, truly, but still more truly have you been a devilish human being."

This, then, is the question that the letters ask with terrible urgency: What was the nature of the relationship between Kafka and the things that, according to a universal convention he himself accepted with a self-tormenting and quasi-religious resolution, make

up the world's external reality? Was his inner life, and thus also his will, related to that world in a "natural" manner? That is, in a manner expressible, if at all, not alone through his art—and even through his art only obscurely; for his is an art more poignantly and disturbingly obscure than literature has ever known. Does it, therefore, make sense at all to speak of the carrying-out or not-carrying-out of his will, if this will is perhaps untranslatable into anything that can "really" be willed or done? Suppose Felice, long after these two futile wedding preparations in two cities, long after the termination of the engagement, perhaps long after Kafka's death, had gathered the courage to read these letters again, and then asked herself: Was it really "I" whom he thought he loved? Would she not have discovered that "she" had no real existence on these sheets of paper? Indeed, as the end of their liaison approached, he knew, and remarked in his diary of September 21, 1917, that she, the "real" Felice, bore an excessive burden of unhappiness; while he, the artist and conjurer of the unreal, said of himself—perhaps unconsciously following the model of Goethe's Tasso—that where others would be silenced by their pain, he, in his suffering, with his "head still smarting from unhappiness," was yet able to "go beyond that and with as many flourishes as I have the talent for … ring simple, or contrapuntal, or a whole orchestration of changes on my theme" (diary, September 19, 1917). Must she not have felt most terribly betrayed, although he had never deceived her intentionally, and even if she recognized that nothing ever had raised her so high as did the incandescent language of his letters?

As deeply problematical as Kafka's love, was his attitude toward his writing. And this is why the "true" executor of his will would have had to be a magician, the producer of a sequence of mythical scenes where his works, after they had been burned, would rise again from the ashes, purified, in unheard-of beauty and perfection, consisting of nothing but "sheer light, sheer freedom, sheer power, no shadow, no barrier." Thus Schiller once described his highest poetic aspiration; and Kafka, after completing "A Country Doctor" in September 1917, confided to his diary that writing such stories could still give him "passing satisfaction," but happiness he would

know only if he succeeded in “raising the world into the pure, the true, and the immutable.” Often it seems that Kafka had no will except this; and this one aspired to a world in which no “last wills” had to be made, because it was that “spiritual world” which, he once said, alone had true existence: “What we call the world of the senses is the evil in the spiritual world”; and the never-satisfied claim he made upon art, his art, was that it should cleanse the only true world, the spiritual one, of the evil in it—by means of the absolute perfection of its language. Certainly language is the most common possession of all men: all people speak, just as in the nation of mice everyone whistles, but only in the whistling of Kafka’s artist, the singing mouse Josephine, is it “free from the fetters of daily life and it sets us free too for a little while.”

Flaubert meant so much to Kafka that he could have said of him what he once wrote to Felice of Strindberg (October 26, 1916): “One has only to close one’s eyes and one’s own blood delivers lectures” about him. And it was Flaubert who once dreamed of “writing a book about nothing at all, a book that would have not the slightest bearing upon the external world and would be held together entirely by the inner force of its style.” This ambition, which in the case of Flaubert aimed at absolute aestheticism, with Kafka took off its aesthetic mask and clearly showed its religious features: Kafka once called his writing a form of prayer; and whenever he tried to convince Felice that he must not marry, he almost always spoke of his literary vocation as if its fulfillment depended upon his keeping a monk’s vow of celibacy. His notebook contains this entry: “The world—F. is its representative—and my ego are tearing my body apart in a conflict that there is no resolving.”

Only if his writing goes well has he the strength to live: this he tells her again and again, and as early as November 1, 1912, he confesses that, had he met her “during a barren period,” he would never have been courageous enough to approach her. But if there is, for once, such rare abundance of productive energy, he must not waste it upon “living.” For when he is deserted by his art, he feels

forsaken by God and cannot live up to the demands of any human relationship.

If ever there was a truly vicious circle, this is it. Even in the initial stages of their correspondence she, with the instinct of a woman threatened by a powerful rival, had obviously counseled him to be more moderate in his literary dedication. No, he replies on November 5, 1912, he would be a "hopeless fool" if he did what she requests: "If I spare myself in this respect, I am not really sparing myself, I am committing suicide"; it is quite possible that his writing is "worthless"; but if so, then he too is "definitely and without doubt worthless." And although his anxieties at the prospect of marriage seem sometimes prompted by the fear of sexual impotence, they are also, and probably much more so, due to his misgivings about a manner of living that might be the betrayal of his inmost truth.

And was human sexuality not more than anything else cursed with that curse that had upset the congruity between within and without? Was it not unavoidable that for him the unequivocal directness of the act of love should persistently be brought into question by inner voices denying that it was true to the complex inner state? One of these voices makes itself heard in a diary note of July 5, 1916: "The hardships of living together. Forced upon us by strangeness, pity, lust, cowardice, vanity, and only deep down, perhaps, a thin little stream worthy of the name of love, impossible to seek out, flashing once in the moment of a moment." This was written during the few summer days of 1916 that he spent in Marienbad with Felice who then, most likely for the first time, was his mistress. Years afterwards, those days shine in his memory with the light of a perplexed happiness; and yet even then they are recalled not without doubt and a little terror. At the end of January 1922, he was in the Bohemian resort of Spindlermühle. What would it be like, he asks in his diary, if Milena—the woman whose love then dominated his life—joined him there? Of course, it would give him some pleasure; and yet it would be terrible: "I should be plunged into a world in which I could not live." And then: "It only remains to solve the riddle of why I had fourteen days of happiness in Marienbad." Whatever may be the solution to this riddle, one

answer may well be that he was not all that happy, or at least that his happiness did not last two weeks. In any case, whatever he may have felt six years ago, now, he says, it is too late. Let others be in love and make love; for himself, this is now unthinkable: “I am too far away, am banished.” True, he has a few representatives in the regions “down there,” but his main sustenance grows “from other roots in other climes.”

Was it, then, his writing that came from those roots or breathed that air? Sometimes he seemed to believe this. During such periods his “true life” consisted in defending his writing desk, and happiness was in writing well. Melancholy threatened when he wrote badly, disaster when he reached a dead point. Then his laments sounded as if they were for a lost love; but he was referring to his stories when he spoke of their “withdrawing” from him, “rejecting” him, or “denying themselves” to him. If for some time he was unable to write, he was “in a void.” On June 26, 1913, he wrote Felice that only in the depth of writing resided his center of gravity, and he apparently had no notion how much she must have been hurt by his telling her at the same time that she had this much in common with his job (and she knew of course that he detested it): that she too was “on the surface of life.” Thus a marriage with her would be compatible with the office but not with his existence as a writer.

*Was* his “true” life then rooted in literature? It would be unduly simple to put it like this. An amateur graphologist, whom Felice had met during a vacation, had “analyzed” Kafka’s character for her from his handwriting. She sent him the result. “The man in your pension should leave graphology alone,” Kafka replied on August 14, 1913. For his findings were all wrong: neither is he, Kafka, “very determined” in his actions nor “extremely sensual”; on the contrary, he has a “magnificent, inborn capacity for asceticism.” And so on, and nothing whatever in that person’s findings is correct. But the most absurdly false thing to say of him is that he is interested in literature. There is no grain of truth in this, Kafka protests: “I have no literary interests, but am made of literature, I am nothing else,

and cannot be anything else." And then he goes on to tell her a little episode from a history of Satanism he was just reading: A monk had the gift of singing so beautifully that everybody who heard him listened with sheer delight. But one day another cleric believed he recognized the voice of Satan in that loveliness and proceeded to exorcise him; and the singer whose life resided entirely in his gift of song dropped dead and his body began at once to decay. "The relationship," Kafka comments, "between me and literature is similar … except that my literature is not as sweet as that monk's voice." This means, as he warns Felice again on August 22, 1913, that as his wife she would have to lead "a monastic life at the side of a man who is peevish, miserable, silent, discontented, and sickly," who "is chained to invisible literature by invisible chains." And two days later he affirms once more that he has no "bent for writing," as she must have called it in a letter to him; no, certainly not, he answers, this is no "bent": "A bent can be uprooted and crushed. But this is what I am." It follows that what he expected of the executor of his will was aid in a kind of posthumous suicide.

He is nothing but literature, he says; and he says it so often, with such determination, and in such excellent prose as nobody has ever said what he did not believe. Yet not less frequently, and with equal determination, and surely not in worse prose, he says still more: that for this reason he has forfeited his chances of salvation. No doubt it seemed to him that his "true life" consisted in writing, that his whole existence had its "center of gravity" in the depth of literary creation, that through art alone he might raise the world into "the pure, the true, and the immutable," and that marriage or profession, indeed the whole world as perceived through the senses, was nothing but the evil in the only "real"—the spiritual—world, a world that art, and only art, could make accessible to the senses without itself falling prey to evil. But it merely seemed so. "In reality" it was precisely at this point that the devil lay in wait for his chosen victim: for him who deluded himself with such superstitions. Kafka's faith in the high spiritual rank of his art was indeed an intermittent one; more often he believed that art was his curse.

In a long letter that Kafka wrote to Max Brod at the beginning of July 1922, the condemnation of his art—and, it would seem, not only of his—reaches its climax. “Writing sustains me,” Kafka says in that letter, as he said so often to Felice. But what sort of life is it that is thus sustained? An extremely questionable one: “Writing is a delicious reward. But for what? During the last night the answer was as clear to me as a lesson meant for little children: reward for services rendered to the devil.” And this is followed by Kafka’s description, as grand as it is precise, of what he sees as devilish in writing: “This descent to dark powers, this unbinding of spiritual forces whose nature it is to be bound together, these dubious embraces and what else may go on down there that is forgotten when one writes one’s stories in the light of the sun. Perhaps there is also another kind of writing. I know only this.”

In the letters to Felice, Kafka never tires of indicting, with apparently inexhaustible resourcefulness, the pursuit of literature as a form of living. For him, this manner of existence is “devilish” because of the insatiable sense of aesthetic enterprise with which the artist builds imaginary houses and palaces in order to look at them admiringly and offer them to the admiring inspection of other men, while as a “human being” he is without a home. “It is,” Kafka writes in that letter to Brod, the artist’s “vanity and love of pleasure that perpetually gyrate around and delight in himself, or even someone else—in which case the movement multiplies and becomes a solar system of vanities”; it is, furthermore, the “unreality” of poetic existence that, more “mortal” than any other mortal life, “cannot last,” is “not even made of dust” but is “a mere construction of the chase after pleasure.” What others know as the self is, in the case of the poet, debarred from eternal life because it has lived not even once. “I have remained clay,” Kafka writes, “I have not used the spark for making fire but merely for illuminating my deadness.” At the beginning of August 1914—perhaps because Europe behaved at that time as if she insisted upon becoming more “real” every day—he notes in his diary with the utmost clarity the consumptive manner of his experiencing the real: “My talent for portraying my

dreamlike inner life has thrust all other matters into the background."

He demanded of Felice that she should write to him more and more often in order to assure him of his own self and their love in the only form truly appropriate to him (if he was not in the mood to implore her to write less because the arrival of a letter made him incapable of dealing with the business of the day). And once, when she had obviously apologized for not having written a letter he expected, he replied (during the night of February 21–22, 1913): "Neither in the office nor in the tram could you write to me. Shall I tell you why, dearest? You didn't know whom to write to. I am no target for letters." For he did not really exist; he only existed, he thought, in the "unreality" of literature.

This is the curse: He is nothing when he cannot write; and he is in a different kind of nothingness if, rarely enough, he believes he has written well. As early as the first weeks of their correspondence, he tells Felice (November 1, 1912) that, whenever he is unsuccessful in his attempts to write, he lies collapsed on the floor, "fit for the dustbin." This is clearly an allusion to that "exceptionally repulsive story" (as he calls *The Metamorphosis* in the letter of November 24, 1912) where at the end the charwoman applies the broom to the insect corpse of Gregor Samsa, and afterwards laughingly announces to his parents and sister that they need not worry any more about "how to get rid of the thing next door." And on November 29–30, Kafka, writing during a night that has been sleepless with frustration, promises Felice that in future he will behave more like an affectionate fiancé: for "surely I can't be utterly thrown out of my writing after having thought more than once that I was sitting in its center, settled in its comforting warmth." Small wonder that, not so long after this sorrowful love letter (addressed, it would seem, more to his art than to Felice), during the night of January 14–15, 1913, when apparently his work is going well, he confides what surely must remain incomprehensible to her: that he will be a faithless husband because night after night he will commit adultery with his writing. Innocently and cluelessly, she had obviously told him that she would sit up with him while he was writing. No, he replies, that

would make writing quite impossible for him because even the loneliest night was not night enough to give him the stillness and solitude he needs for it. For writing demands surrender without the slightest restraint, a degree of sincerity and honesty from which a man, "as long as he is in his right mind," must refrain in his dealings with other people, be it the most beloved person. For the ground on which he stands—or even two human beings stand together—begins to shake as soon as that "truer emotion" wells up in him which alone can give valid form to the work: "I have often thought that the best mode of life for me would be to sit in the innermost room of a spacious locked cellar with my writing things and a lamp.… And how I would write! From what depths I would drag it up! Without effort! For extreme concentration knows no effort. The trouble is that I might not be able to keep it up for long, and at the first failure —which perhaps even in these circumstances could not be avoided —would be bound to end in a grandiose fit of madness."

Only when Kafka dwells in his writing does he dwell in his truth. This truth is not to be found anywhere else. For it is such that he who has lived with it must become insane if he is deprived of it; and life itself, the world in which, for instance, marriages are made, *is* this deprivation. Would she please tell her "cellar-dweller" what she will think of that, after she has become his beloved and deceived wife? But he saves her the trouble of an answer. Half a year later, in his letter of August 22, 1913, he says it himself: If the truth of what he writes is to be measured in terms of the "real" (and here truth changes sides again and emerges now as the ally of "reality"), the result of such an assessment would be, he says, an unfathomable disproportion, a disproportion to which much later, in a letter to Max Brod (July 22, 1922), he gives a simple and exact name: lie. At that time he had just read the memoirs of the German writer and poet Theodor Storm, and quoted the conversation Storm and the poet Eduard Mörike once had about Heinrich Heine, whom they both admired. Mörike said in his homely Swabian dialect: "He is a poet through and through, but not for a quarter of an hour could I

live with him: because of the lie right in the middle of his being." And Kafka comments: "And this is, at least seen from one angle, a brilliant summing-up of what I think of the writer"—of *any* writer.

Once again literature, which only a little while ago had been the purest servant of truth, shaking to their foundations all illusory "realities," is itself the purest lie. And why? Because it demands of him who practices it, indeed who *is* literature, the abandonment of the real world. Thus it is not surprising that again and again Kafka is tempted to side with the world against himself. And how well the world sometimes fared in his care! Immeasurably better than it deserved! The writer who like no other has anticipated in his imagination the horrors of an epoch that began with World War I accepted, as again these letters show, the war itself in the matter-of-fact manner of the many who easily become reconciled to whatever it is that happens. Moreover, he saw the war as his chance to escape into a real battle from the agony of the unreal one that went on in his brain and heart. On August 27, 1916, he noted in his diary: "There is no question of your first task: to become a soldier." He made several efforts in this direction, even if, very probably, in the way in which he had made many other efforts: in the sure expectation of failure. Before the war, he never questioned the crisis-ridden and fragile "reality" of the late Habsburg monarchy. In this respect he was not different from any other loyal subject of the Emperor. Indeed, he was in the apocalyptic mood "to advocate retreat … for everything" (to Felice, October 27, 1912) because on the Balkan Peninsula the political situation became more and more menacing to Austria. True, he detested the noisy processions of patriotic crowds hailing the Austrian declaration of war: these, he wrote in his diary, belonged to the most repugnant occurrences accompanying the war; and he turned—almost in the manner of the Jewish Viennese satirist Karl Kraus—anti-Semitic by blaming them on the Jewish merchants "who are German one day, Czech the next." Yet he blamed himself and not the event for whatever was negative in his feelings about the war. He was, he said, an "empty vessel" that was yet "full of lies, hate, and envy"; he discovered nothing but wickedness in his heart: "pettiness, indecision, envy,

and hatred against those who are fighting." Later, on April 5, 1915, when Felice had obviously asked him whether the war made him suffer, he answered that, if he suffered, then it was mostly because "I myself am taking no part." One month later, on May 6, 1915, he wrote that he would be happy to become a soldier. Very soon he was to have his medical examination, and Felice should wish, as much as he did himself, that they will "accept" him.

If one seriously believes that Kafka is very important for our understanding of the age in which he lived and wrote, then, for a while at least, one ought to turn a deaf ear to the din of analyses that find the causes of our wars and other troubles exclusively in colonialism, class struggles, and the dialectics of history; and ought to listen instead to the still voice with which a man, despairing of himself, opts for a world that, spiritually forsaken as it is, cannot but destroy itself.

On September 20, 1912, Kafka wrote his first letter to Felice whom, whether he knew it or not, he had sought out as his refuge from the onrush of his "unreality." Three months later, on New Year's Eve, he already had a distinct premonition of the final futility of his attempt to escape, and wrote her the astonishing letter which is, from beginning to end, "literature," "true" literature. In this letter he demands her answer to a question which, when it comes to it, is no question at all but a description of himself in his exceedingly problematical relationship to her and to the world (even the wording of the "question" is reminiscent of his aphorism "You are the task. No pupil far and wide"): he has, he says, put his question in "more than plain" form because he wants her answer too to be overprecise and given "independent from every point of view, even from that of reality" (overprecise to the point of the unreal—what an admirable characterization of his own work!). And he concludes his letter with the wish to draw her "closer, closer, closer" to himself; but at this point he appears to have been overcome by the suspicion that he desires the impossible because she and he live in different worlds, he in his own—as he thought—non-world, and she —well, she in Berlin. "Where are you at this moment?" he asks, "From whose company am I drawing you away?" On the surface, to

be sure, he meant only some Berlin New Year's party, but as he roused himself from the immersion in his letter, he may well have known how menacingly much he said: not "from *whose* company," but possibly out of human society as such.

Overprecise to the point of the unreal: this is certainly true of the letter of November 12, 1912, in which, three months and a half after the occurrence, he describes to her the evening of August 13, when he met her for the first time. Testimony to love at first sight? To an eye immensely sharpened by that love? To a memory enhanced in its exactitude by the incipient passion? Possibly so; yet at the same time it is a document of that literary realism which has invited the epithet "magic," one of those documents that, through their hectic meticulousness, reveal the anxiety of an imagination more and more enclosed within itself and therefore fearing that it might in the end lose the real altogether if it does not intensely watch over its every detail. In such a hypnotically "realistic" description there is no trace to be found of that composure of mind with which Homer describes the shield of Achilles, knowing well that he can safely rely upon the solid reality of the shield as much as upon the appropriateness of his language to that reality. With Kafka there is, instead of such equanimity, the nervous desire to obtain from words the guarantee that "the real" has still some validity for the inner sense, that it still "counts."

An "empty face that wore its emptiness openly"—this is how Kafka's diary describes Felice after their first meeting. Empty: thus it offers as much room as an empty page to the expansive imagination. And indeed, this imagination instantly falls in love, and before long word-storms, let loose in Prague, will blow around the beloved empty face in Berlin. It begins on September 20, 1912, five weeks after their first and, for the time being, only brief meeting in the midst of other people, and begins with "My dear Fräulein Bauer." This letter, rather significantly, happens to coincide with the onrush of that sustained *literary* inspiration which, among other writings, produced "The Judgment," written two days later in the eight hours

of one night, the story in which F.B., to whom it is dedicated, lends her initials to the equally "empty" figure of Frieda Brandenfeld, just as she will lend them later to Fräulein Bürstner in *The Trial* and, in the shortened form F., to Frieda—Frieda again!—in *The Castle.* And what began with "My dear Fräulein Bauer" rises, driven on by the imagination and the written word, to "Dear Fräulein Felice," and "Dearest Fräulein Felice," and ultimately to the ecstatic "*Du*" of November 14, 1912, erupting in the letter that addresses her as "Dearest." Yet this embrace by the imagination and on paper is certainly no token of an early rendezvous. When Felice suggests a Christmas meeting in the "external reality" of Berlin, Kafka refuses, saying that he must use the few free days for his writing. And this he does; but what he writes is, above all, letters to her.

This is the onset of those years filled with the agonies of the struggle—not the struggle for this woman whom he could have taken as his wife at any time he chose if he truly wanted a home in this world, but the struggle for the "reality" of world, marriage, and home. It is moving and at the same time terrifying to watch his words—how, in their entrancing dexterity and calculated helplessness, they woo this "reality" of hers, those fragments of reality he gathers in through this correspondence, and how they maintain the precarious state of balance between the "real" and the "literary." And all the time they are on the verge of becoming literature themselves, indulging in mythologizing, now abysmally sad and now again comical. In an instant Kafka can transform the real pain with which he awaits, often in vain, Felice's letters into the occasion for writing an enchanting comedy scene, in which his office staff, Mergl, Wottawa, and Böhm, appear as three comic *postillons d'amour*, all trained by him to bring him with the utmost haste the letters arriving from Berlin. Or, having urged Felice time and again to describe her every day in minute particularity, he endows this or that triviality she reports with the quality of a mythic moment: the nocturnal signal, for instance, with which she announces to her mother that she has come home. Or he implores her to send him photographs, and more and more photographs, this paper currency of "real" moments ever more devalued by every

passing hour; and as soon as he holds them in his hands, he loses himself in the intense contemplation of those shadow appearances which, like the face in its outer emptiness, allow the inner gaze to descend into the depths of the imagination and at the same time maintain the illusion that its attention is fixed upon the reality of what is so "realistically" depicted. And he studies these mechanical reproductions as if they were all veiled images of a goddess, vaguely promising that one day she might reveal herself and, with herself, the mystery of the meaning of the world. Or the subject of the correspondence is the "reality," menacingly approaching, of the marriage quarters and the question of how to furnish them; and momentarily the sumptuous stuff she purchases turns into a brood of dragons obstructing the knight's progress toward his beloved. Everything he does comes to the same: it perfectly succeeds as literature, and perfectly fails in coming to grips with the "real" situation.

Only once do these letters fill themselves with more "reality": after their stay in Marienbad during the summer of 1916. At about that time a Jewish People's Home had been founded in Berlin; Felice helped there in looking after refugees, particularly the children, from Eastern Europe, and Kafka immersed himself in her pedagogical problems, encouraged and counseled her, recommended reading matter for her or her pupils, sent her parcels of books, and attended with sagacity and common sense to the "real." The first contact—indeed, through her activity, not his—with a "real," even a social and national, effort that struck him as good and sensible calmed his mind for a while, although he told her in his letter of September 12, 1916, that on examination it would become clear that he was not a Zionist. This was probably due to his suspicion that the "normalization" of the Jews in a national state would endanger exactly that which he regarded as the most valuable Jewish quality, found above all among East European Jews: a particular kind of religiousness and spirituality, something that was "unreal," but unreal in a—for once—positive sense. Be this as it may, the time in which it seemed that he and Felice might found their life together upon something "real" was very brief. His

anxieties returned and were, if anything, more intense than before. Despite this, there was the second engagement. Yet soon afterwards Kafka suffered the hemorrhage, symptom of the disease from which, as he knew, he would never recover. For the blood did not simply come from the sick lung, but from the wound that one of the two enemies fighting within him had inflicted upon the other.

One of the two enemies. Which one? No doubt the "real" one, for Kafka really died of this wound. It would nonetheless be rash to say that "reality" proved stronger in the end than literature—or that to which, following Kafka's usage, we have given the modest name of "literature." For the truth is that literature for him was not just literature; despite the devilish suspicions he indefatigably uttered against it, it remained the only means by which he tried to give perfect form and shape to a life that, after all, did not quite reject the demand for meaning, or at least allowed meaning faintly to shine from the depth through layers and layers of the meaningless that had all but covered it up. Indeed, Kafka is not altogether wrong in saying to Felice that he is nothing but literature—"real" literature. For almost everything he has written possesses the indisputable "reality" and "being" that are rare in modern writing and transcend most "realities" of the age. In this sense too these letters are, like himself, "literature." There is about them nothing that is mere whim or caprice—nothing of the kind of privacy that makes the publication of many an intimate correspondence painful and forbidden. And they have this in common with the songs of the minnesingers: that she to whom they are addressed is not "really" being courted.

In this century it is certainly too much to expect that these letters will inspire some readers to study the poetry of the minnesingers rather than to recite Freudian theorems, long since learned by heart. Indeed, it is to be feared that, for instance, Kafka Senior, whom Franz himself is likely to have done some injustice, will lose his once so overpowering personality altogether, assuming instead the role of a theoretical superego or turning into a kind of Old Prague ghost of King Laios, father of Oedipus, as soon as it becomes known that his son wrote to Felice (on August 30, 1913) that it was not

“facts” that prevented him from making her and himself happy, but “an insurmountable fear, fear of achieving happiness, a desire and a command to torment myself for some higher purpose.” And people will cry “impotence” upon reading, in the letter of July 10, 1913, that the obstacle to their marriage was his “dread of the union even with the most beloved woman.” They will know much better than the writer himself what was the cause of this “unappeasable apprehension”; for he himself accepted this anxiety as if it were “a command from heaven.”

A command from heaven: to feel this in a world that serves its citizens with very different, and apparently more dependable, information about the discomfort of their souls—might this not justify a little the misfortune of this love? Even, perhaps, justify the misery that Kafka must have caused Felice? Had he been born in Provence, not in Prague, and not toward the end of the nineteenth but in the eleventh century, he might have become a Duke of Aquitaine, one of the first poets who spoke and sang of a love, a *minne*, that desired no consummation but meant the faithful hope of transcendent yet not unreal bliss.

Love letters? On February 12, 1922, Kafka entered in his diary that he had never known in himself the words “I love you,” but only “the expectant stillness that should have been broken by my ‘I love you,’ that is all I have known, nothing more.” It is the languid minnesong of a poet to whom, because there is no God, even love denies itself—or whose love is so irresistibly drawn into the empty upper spheres that it misses its earthly assignation with the beloved, just as Kafka, in the astonishingly precise fantasies he records in his New Year 1912–13 letter, misses his appointment with Felice.

# *Editors' Note*

In 1955 Schocken Books acquired from Felice Bauer Franz Kafka's letters addressed to her. She also handed over to the publishers those of Kafka's letters to her friend Grete Bloch that were in her possession. This part of the correspondence—about half the letters from Kafka to Grete Bloch published here—was given to her by Grete Bloch when the latter emigrated from Germany in 1935. The remaining letters to Grete Bloch were deposited by the recipient with her lawyer in Florence at a later date. It was he who placed photostats of these letters at the disposal of Max Brod, and through Max Brod this part of the correspondence finally came into the possession of Schocken Books.

The editors decided to incorporate in chronological order Kafka's letters to Grete Bloch, as well as letters concerning the engagement written by members of Kafka's family and friends and preserved by Felice; they form part of the history of this relationship, and help to convey a more accurate picture of Kafka's situation at that time. Biographical notes on Felice Bauer and Grete Bloch are included; other people mentioned in the correspondence are identified in notes.

All letters to Felice Bauer and Grete Bloch, where the originals or copies are in the possession of Schocken Books, have been included in this edition and printed in full.

The editors had access to all letters in the original. The majority are in Kafka's handwriting; the others are typed. It is apparent from this correspondence that not all of Kafka's letters to Felice have survived; from references in the text it is clear that a number of letters and postcards are missing. Unlike Kafka's letters to Felice Bauer, which were in perfect condition, twelve of those to Grete Bloch had been cut to pieces in a peculiar way; however, with one exception, it has been possible to reconstruct these letters, although

parts of them had been in two different places for years on end—one lot with Felice Bauer, the other with Grete Bloch's lawyer.

The context shows that some of Kafka's letters were undated. In these cases an attempt has been made to ascertain the probable date. As in all other additions by the editors, such dates are printed in square brackets.

Felice's letters to Kafka have evidently not survived.

E.H. J.B.

***Felice Bauer*** was born in Neustadt, Upper Silesia, on November 18, 1887. She had four brothers and sisters: Elisabeth (Else), Erna, Antonie (Toni), and Ferdinand (Ferry). Erna, under the abbreviation E., appears many times in Kafka's diaries, especially during the second half of 1914—i.e., after the breaking-off of his engagement to Felice. Her father, who came from Vienna, married the daughter of a dyer living in Neustadt. In 1899—when Felice was 12—the family moved from the small town in Silesia to Berlin, where her father worked as an agent for a foreign insurance company. For six years, from 1904 to 1910, Felice's parents lived apart, and Felice was anxious to help her mother to support the family. Thus, after leaving school in 1908, she started work as a shorthand-typist with the gramophone record firm of Odeon; in 1909 she moved to the firm of Carl Lindström A.G., manufacturers of dictating machines and Parlographs. Within a short time she was promoted to executive secretary.

Until March 1913 the Bauers lived on Immanuelkirchstrasse, a quiet but not particularly attractive street in Berlin's East End. Then they moved to Wilmersdorferstrasse which at that time was part of one of the smarter residential areas of Berlin's West End. Felice's father died in November 1914.

In September 1916, encouraged by Kafka, Felice volunteered for work in the Jewish People's Home in Berlin, a center for Jewish relief work founded by Siegfried Lehmann in May of that year and situated near the Alexanderplatz, a section of Berlin largely inhabited by East European Jews, both war refugees and immigrants. Max Brod, Martin Buber, and Gustav Landauer were among its supporters. The purpose of the Home was the cultural and religious education of the children and young people from these families, some of whom were living in extremely reduced circumstances. The teachers, the so-called helpers, in the Home were drawn from among students, young businessmen, and women of the Jewish religious community. Although many of them came

from well-to-do backgrounds in the West End, they all dressed very simply so that their pupils should not be conscious of social differences.

Felice, who devoted her free time to this social work, was held in high esteem by her fellow helpers. She was very popular with young people (she taught a class of girls). From Prague, Franz Kafka gave her advice on her new occupation; he recommended and supplied her with educational literature for her own use, as well as reading matter for her pupils. In fact he followed the work of the Home with keen attention.

All testimonials and reports on Felice Bauer emphasize her efficiency and common sense in practical matters—qualities which, as Kafka says, he himself lacked entirely, and which throughout his life he often admired extravagantly in others, not least in Felice and subsequently in Grete Bloch, who was to play such an important role in his relationship with Felice. Felice appears to have been a positive, uncomplicated person. Kafka once described her as “a happy, healthy, self-confident girl.” She liked pretty clothes, enjoyed traveling, but was prepared to sacrifice much for the sake of helping her family. Her taste in literature, art, and furnishing was that of the middle classes of her time. She evidently had little understanding for Kafka’s literary work.

In March 1919, fifteen months after her final parting from Kafka, Felice married a well-to-do Berlin businessman. Of this marriage there were two children, a son and a daughter. That Kafka knew of the birth of these children is clear from his letters to Milena Jesenská and Max Brod.

In 1931 Felice and her family moved to Switzerland, and in 1936 to the United States, where she died on October 15, 1960.

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

Prague, September 20, 1912

My dear Fräulein Bauer,

In the likelihood that you no longer have even the remotest recollection of me, I am introducing myself once more: my name is Franz Kafka, and I am the person who greeted you for the first time that evening at Director Brod's[1] in Prague, the one who subsequently handed you across the table, one by one, photographs of a Thalia trip,[2] and who finally, with the very hand now striking the keys, held your hand, the one which confirmed a promise to accompany him next year to Palestine.

Now, if you still wish to undertake this journey—you said at the time you are not fickle, and I saw no signs of it in you—then it will be not only right but absolutely essential for us to start discussing this journey at once. For we shall have to make use of every minute of our holiday, which in any case is far too short, especially for a trip to Palestine, and this we can do only by preparing ourselves as thoroughly as possible and by agreeing on all preparations.

One thing I have to confess, bad as it sounds, and ill as it accords with what I have just said: I am an erratic letter writer. Yes, and it would be worse still if I didn't have a typewriter; for if my mood doesn't happen to feel equal to a letter, there are still my fingertips to do the writing. On the other hand, I never expect a letter to be answered by return; even when awaiting a letter day after day with renewed anticipation, I am never disappointed when it doesn't come, and when finally it does come, I incline to be startled. While inserting a new sheet of paper, I realize that I may have described myself as far more difficult than I am. If I have made this mistake it would serve me right, for why do I choose to write this letter after six hours in the office, and on a typewriter I am not used to.

And yet, and yet—the only disadvantage of using a typewriter is that one easily loses the thread—if doubts were raised, practical doubts I mean, about choosing me as a traveling companion, guide,

encumbrance, tyrant, or whatever else I might turn into, there shouldn't be any prior objections to me as a correspondent—and for the time being this is the only thing at issue—and as such, you might well give me a trial.

Yours very sincerely, Dr. Franz Kafka

Pořič 7, Prague

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

Prague, September 28, 1912

My dear Fräulein Bauer, forgive me for not using the typewriter, but I have such an enormous amount to tell you, and the typewriter is outside in the corridor; besides, this letter strikes me as so urgent; also, today is a holiday[3] here in Bohemia (which strictly speaking doesn't belong to the above apology); the typewriter doesn't write fast enough for my liking; the weather is lovely, warm, the window is open (but my windows are always open), and I did something I hadn't done for a long time, I arrived in the office humming; and if I hadn't come to get your letter, I really don't know why I should have come to the office at all on this holiday.

How did I get your address? When you ask that question, that's not the question you are asking. I just managed to cadge your address. First I got the name of some corporation, but I didn't like that. Then I was given the address of your apartment without the number, and eventually the number as well. Now I was satisfied, and of course didn't write, for I considered the address as something in itself; besides, I was afraid the address might be wrong, for who was Immanuel Kirch? And nothing is sadder than sending a letter to a doubtful address; that's no letter, it's more like a sigh. Then, when I discovered that there is an Immanuel Church in your street, all was well again for a while. But in addition to your address I would have liked to have some indication of the compass point, since a Berlin address always has it. I for my part would like to have placed you in the North, although I believe this is a poor district.

But apart from this worry over addresses (in Prague it is not even known whether you live at No. 20 or 30), how much did my wretched letter have to suffer before it was written! Now that the door between us is beginning to move, or at least we are both holding the handle, surely I can, in fact I even must, say it. Oh, the moods I get into, Fräulein Bauer! A hail of nervousness pours down upon me continuously. What I want one minute I don't want the next. When I have reached the top of the stairs, I still don't know the state I shall be in when I enter the apartment. I have to pile up uncertainties within myself before they turn into a little certainty or a letter. How many evenings—to avoid exaggeration I'll say 10—did I spend composing that first letter before going to sleep! Now it is one of my failings that I cannot write down automatically anything I have put together beforehand. My memory is very bad, but even the best of memories could not help me to write down accurately even a short paragraph which I have thought out in advance and tried to memorize; for within each sentence there are transitions that have to remain in suspense before it is written down. Then, when I sit down to write the memorized sentence, I see nothing but fragments lying about; I can see neither through them nor beyond them, and the only thing to do would be to throw away my pen, if my half heartedness would let me. Nevertheless I did ponder over that letter, for I had by no means decided to write it, and of course these ponderings are the best way to prevent me from writing. I remember that I once actually got out of bed to write down what I had thought out for you; but I promptly returned to bed, because—and this is my second failing—I reproached myself for the foolishness of my anxiety, and decided that what was so clear in my head could just as well be committed to paper in the morning. Around midnight such decisions always win out.

But if I go on like this I'll never get anywhere. I am chattering about my last letter instead of telling you all I have to say. Please understand why that first letter has assumed such importance for me. It is because you answered it with the letter that lies here beside me, which has made me absurdly happy and upon which I am now laying my hand to be conscious of owning it. Please write me

another one soon. Don't make an effort, a letter requires effort, however one looks at it; just keep a little diary for me; this demands less and gives more. Of course you will have to write more in it than you would for yourself alone, since I don't really know you at all. You must record, for instance, at what time you get to the office, what you had for breakfast, what you see from your office window, what kind of work you do there, the names of your male and female friends, why you get presents, who tries to undermine your health by giving you sweets, and the thousand things of whose existence and possibilities I know nothing.—But oh, what has happened to the trip to Palestine? In the near future, or the not so near future, by next spring or autumn for certain.—Max's operetta[4] is now dormant; he is in Italy, but soon he will thrust upon your Germany an enormous literary yearbook.[5] My book, booklet, pamphlet has been accepted at last.[6] But it is not very good; better things will have to be written. And with this verdict I bid you farewell!

Yours, Franz Kafka

October 13, 1912

Dear Fräulein Bauer,

Fifteen days ago, at 10 o'clock in the morning, I received your first letter, and a few minutes later I sat down and wrote you four pages of enormous size.[7] I don't regret it, for I could not have spent the time with greater pleasure, and my only regret is that when I had finished I had made but a very small beginning of what I wanted to say, so that the suppressed part of the letter preoccupied me for days and made me restless, until this restlessness was replaced by the anticipation of your reply and the gradual waning of this anticipation.

But why haven't you written to me?—It is possible, and from the manner of that letter even probable, that there was something foolish in it that may have disconcerted you, but it is not possible that the good intention behind my every word could have escaped you.—Could a letter have gone astray? But mine was mailed with

too great an eagerness for it to have missed its aim, while yours was too eagerly awaited. And do letters really get lost except in the mind of one waiting for them and unable to find another explanation?—Could my letter possibly have been kept from you because of the frowned-upon trip to Palestine? But can this really happen within a family, and to you of all people? And according to my calculations the letter should have arrived on Sunday morning.—So there remains only the sad possibility that you are ill. But this I do not believe. Surely, you are healthy and cheerful.—But then my reason fails me, and I write this letter not so much in the hope of a reply as to discharge a duty toward myself.

If I were the Immanuelkirchstrasse mailman delivering this letter to your house, I wouldn't allow myself to be detained by any astonished member of your family, but would walk straight through all the rooms to yours and put the letter in your hands; or, better still, I would stand outside your door and keep on ringing the bell for my pleasure, a pleasure that would relieve all tension!

Yours, Franz K.

Pořič 7, Prague

*To Frau Sophie Friedmann*[8]

October 14, 1912

Dear Frau Friedmann,

This evening, by chance and without actual permission—you mustn't be annoyed with me—I read in a letter to your parents a remark to the effect that Fräulein Bauer and I are in lively correspondence. Since this is only partly true but on the other hand would be very much in accordance with my wishes, I ask you, dear Frau Friedmann, to send me a few words to throw light on this remark, which shouldn't be difficult since you and Fräulein Bauer are bound to be in touch by letter.

In fact, the correspondence you referred to as "lively" looks like this: approximately two months after the evening I saw Fräulein Bauer for the first and last time at your parents' house, I wrote her a

letter the contents of which are not worth mentioning since it brought a friendly reply. It was by no means a final reply, and according to its tone and content may well be considered as an introduction to a possibly more intimate correspondence at some future date. But the interval between my letter and the reply lasted ten days, and it occurs to me now that I should have taken this hesitation, though in itself not overlong, as a warning. For a variety of reasons, again not worth mentioning—I probably mention more than enough anyway of what to you, dear Frau Friedmann, cannot seem worth mentioning—I did not do so; instead, immediately after reading that letter, a reading that in some respects may have been too cursory, I wrote my letter which to many eyes may have had the inevitably silly characteristics of an outburst. Nevertheless I can swear that while admitting that all objections to this letter are justified, the objection of dishonesty is not justified, and this after all ought to be the decisive factor for people not unfavorably prejudiced against each other. Well, since that letter was written, sixteen days have passed without my having received a reply and I really don't know what inducement could now produce a belated answer, especially since that particular letter was one of those that are brought to an end merely to create a speedy opportunity for a reply. To make my frankness toward you absolute, I must confess that during these sixteen days I wrote, but did not send, two more letters[9] to Fräulein Bauer, and these are the only ones that, had I a sense of humor, would permit me to refer to a lively correspondence. Indeed I might at first have believed that some fortuitous circumstances could perhaps have prevented a reply to that letter, or even made it impossible, but having considered them all I no longer believe it was fortuitous circumstances.

I certainly would not have dared to make this little confession, either to you, dear Frau Friedmann, or to myself, had I not been so deeply affected by that remark in your letter and had I not known that this very letter, the contents of which are nothing to be proud of, would fall into good and skillful hands.

With kind regards to you and your husband,

yours sincerely, Franz Kafka
Pořič 7, Prague

*To Frau Sophie Friedmann*
[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

October 18, 1912

Dear Frau Friedmann,

The office has to take second place in importance compared to this letter in reply to yours of the 16th which, insofar as it is written by you, is as good, kind, and clear as I expected, while the quoted passage remains a puzzle even at the tenth reading. So your remark about a "lively correspondence" was not made casually and without proof as I, to my shame, imagined—though without admitting it in my last letter, since in that case it would have become superfluous. And this lively correspondence is really supposed to have been in existence on the 3rd or at the earliest on the 2nd of October, thus at a time when my second unanswered, ill-fated letter must definitely have reached Berlin. Could a reply have been written after all? For surely the quoted passage is an admission of the knowledge of that letter? But are letters ever actually lost except in the uncertain expectation of one who can find no other explanation? You have to admit, dear Frau Friedmann, that I was right to write to you, and that this is a matter that calls for the assistance of a good angel.

With kindest regards to you and your husband.

Your indebted Franz K.

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

October 23, 1912

Dear Fräulein Bauer,

And even if all three of my directors were to stand around my table looking straight down my pen, I would have to write to you at once, for your letter has descended upon me as from the clouds, to

which I have been gazing up in vain for three weeks. (At this moment my wish concerning my immediate superior is being fulfilled.) If I am to answer the description of your life during that time with a comparable one, I must tell you that half my life was spent waiting for your letter, which waiting also includes the three short letters I wrote to you during those three weeks (I am just being questioned about insurance for convicts, my God!) of which two could now perhaps be mailed, while the third, actually the first, cannot possibly go. And so your letter is presumably lost (I have just had to explain that I know nothing about a ministerial appeal by Josef Wagner in Katharinaberg) and I won't get any answers to my earlier questions, though I am in no way to blame for the loss.

I am restless and cannot pull myself together; I am in the mood for continual and, as it were, circular complaining, although today is no longer yesterday; but the accumulation will overflow and liberate itself into better days.

What I am writing today is not an answer to your letter; perhaps that answer shall be in tomorrow's letter, possibly not until the following day's. My manner of writing is of course not crazy in itself, but just as crazy as my present way of life, which I may describe to you one of these days.

And you are always being given presents! These books, chocolates, and flowers are spread all over your office desk? On my table there is nothing but wild disorder, and your flower, for which I kiss your hand, I quickly tucked into my wallet which, in spite of the lost and unreplaced letter, already contains two more of yours, because I asked Max to give me your letter to him, which may be rather ridiculous, but otherwise need not be held against me.

This early mishap in our correspondence may have been quite a good thing; at least I now know that, even if letters get lost, I am allowed to write to you. But this must be the end to letters getting lost.—Farewell, and think about a short diary.

Yours, Franz K.

[AT THE TOP OF THE FIRST PAGE] I am so nervous about possible further loss of letters, and you haven't got my address quite right; it should be: Pořič 7 with two hooks, on the r and the c, and to be on the safe side the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute should be added.

I will let you know the date of Frau Sophie's birthday tomorrow.

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

October 24, 1912

Dear Fräulein Bauer,

What a thoroughly sleepless night that was; only toward the end, during the last two hours, one manages to twist oneself into an enforced, premeditated sleep in which dreams are not real dreams and sleep even less like real sleep. And then, as if that weren't enough, I collided with a butcher boy's tray outside the front door, and can still feel the wood above my left eye.

Undoubtedly these preparations will not help me to overcome the difficulties which writing to you creates, and which again last night kept passing through my head in ever-changing forms. They do not consist of an inability to write what I want to say, which are but the simplest things, but there are so many of them that I cannot accommodate them in either time or space. In recognition of this fact there are times—although only at night—when I long to drop everything, stop writing, and perish by not writing rather than by writing.

You talk about your visits to the theater and this interests me very much, firstly because there in Berlin you are at the hub of all theatrical events, secondly because your choice of theaters is very good (except for the Metropol, which I too have attended with a yawning of my whole being, a yawn wider than the entire stage), and thirdly because I myself know nothing whatever about the theatre. On the other hand, what good does it do me to learn about your visits to the theater if I don't know everything that happened before and after, if I don't know what you wore, which day of the

week it was, what the weather was like, whether you dined before or after, where you sat, in what kind of mood you were and why, and so on, as far as thought can reach. Of course it is impossible to tell me everything, but then everything is impossible.

In order to write something that is completely communicable: Frau Sophie's birthday is not until March 18th; and, to ask a direct question, when is yours?

It is not only the restlessness of the office which makes me leap from one subject to another so that I now ask a very different question: I remember more or less everything you said that evening in Prague, so far as one can trust such convictions; but one thing is not quite clear to me, as I realize on reading your letter, and I would like you to fill this gap. To tell the truth, while we were walking from the apartment to the hotel with Director Brod, I was altogether distracted, inattentive, and bored—not that this had anything to do, so far as I know, with Director Brod's presence. On the contrary, I was relatively content to feel I was being left alone. There was some talk of your not mingling with the evening crowds in the city center, not even when you have been to the theater, and that on your return you attract your mother's attention from the street below by some special way of clapping your hands, whereupon she sees that the street door is unlocked for you. Is this somewhat strange description correct? And by taking the keys with you on your visit to the Metropol, were you making an exception simply on account of your unusually late return? Are these questions ridiculous? My face is quite serious, and if you are laughing, please laugh in a friendly way and answer me in detail.

This spring, at the latest, Rowohlt of Leipzig will publish a *Yearbook of Poetry*, edited by Max. It will include one of my short stories, "The Judgment," which will be dedicated "To Fräulein Felice B." Is this dealing too imperiously with your rights? The more so since this dedication was written a month ago, and the manuscript is no longer in my possession? Could it be looked upon as a valid excuse that I forced myself to omit the rest of the sentence: "(To Fräulein B.) so that she does not receive presents only from others"? Besides, so far as I can see, the substance of the

story has not the remotest connection with you except that a girl who makes a fleeting appearance bears the name of Frieda Brandenfeld—which, as I realized later, has the same initials as yours. The only connection would seem to be in the story's attempt to be worthy of you from afar. And this is what the dedication is meant to express.[10]

It worries me that I shall never know what you wrote in reply to my last letter but one. So many years went by without a word from you, and now it looks as though another month of oblivion is to be thrown in quite unnecessarily. Needless to say, I shall make inquiries at the post office, but I stand little chance of learning more of that letter there than you are able to remember. Couldn't you write and tell me in ten words?

Definite end, definite end for today. The interruptions began on the preceding page, even in this quiet room where I have gone into hiding. You are surprised that I have so much free time in the office (it is an extorted exception) and that I write only from the office. For this too there are explanations, but no time to write them down.

Farewell, and don't be annoyed by the daily signing of receipts.[11]

Yours, Franz K.

*To Frau Sophie Friedmann*
[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

October 24, 1912

Dear Frau Friedmann,

Thank you very much for the delicacy with which you handled this matter which now seems to be fully straightened out. I assume I do not have to look upon your failure to answer my last letter, which actually did not call for any particular reply, as punishment for some kind of stupidity which could well have crept into my two letters from nervousness or for some other reasons. But since you knew, dear Frau Friedmann, how I suffer from not receiving replies, you would surely rather have punished my stupidity with an appropriate letter than by not answering. Even now I do not

necessarily expect a reply, but I hope that you will continue to be as well disposed toward me in future as you have demonstrated by your assistance in the recent past. I should also like to thank your husband, but refrain from doing so because firstly it would make me feel slightly uneasy, and secondly because, as I well know, you and your husband are so much at one that gratitude expressed to you is automatically also his.

With kindest regards, yours, Dr. F. Kafka

October 27, 1912

Dear Fräulein Bauer,

At last, at eight o'clock in the evening—it is Sunday—I am able to write to you, and yet everything I have done throughout the day has been aimed at writing to you as soon as possible. Are your Sundays pleasant? But they must be, after all the work you do. For at least the last 6 weeks Sunday for me has been a miracle, the glow of which I begin to see on waking Monday morning. There remains the problem of getting through the week until Sunday, of drawing out my work through those weekdays, but no matter how hard I try, by Friday I usually come to the end. If one spends hour after hour of a week like this, even by day not much less alert than during the sleepless night, and if one takes a look at the merciless mechanical grind of such a week, one really has to be thankful that these days, so desperately mounting up, do not fall back only to start all over again, but simply fade away, and that at last the evening and the night begin and bring relief.

I can be more cheerful, but not today; the rain has deprived me of my Sunday walk; spent—which only seems to contradict my first sentence—half the day in bed, the best place for sadness and reflection; the Turks are losing,[12] a fact which could lead me as a false prophet to advocate retreat, not only for soldiers but for everything (it is also a great blow to our colonies), and there is nothing to do but shut one's eyes and ears and burrow into one's usual occupations.

What a way to entertain you! Dear Fräulein Bauer, shall I get up and stop writing? But perhaps you can see through it all that I am indeed very happy, in which case I can stay here and go on writing.

You mention in your letter how uneasy you felt that evening in Prague, and without saying so and perhaps even without meaning it, this passage suggests that the uneasiness came into the room with me, for until then Max had hardly mentioned his operetta—which, incidentally, has caused him very little trouble or worry—and I had not yet disturbed the harmony of the party with my ridiculous parcel. Besides, this happened to be a time when I used to drop in on them often, and it amused me—by being especially vivacious—all the more so the later it got—to keep Otto Brod, who likes to retire early, from going to bed for so long that the whole family used to join forces (in all affection, of course) to ease me out of the apartment. As a result, my arrival at so late an hour—it must have been past 9 o'clock—represented a certain threat. In their minds they were facing two very different visitors: you, to whom everyone wished to be kind and courteous, and me, the professional disturber of sleep. For you, for example, the piano was played; for me, on the other hand, Otto fidgeted with the fire screen, which for me had become an acknowledged hint for bedtime, but which, for those unaware of it, must have appeared downright silly and tiresome. But I had not been in the least prepared to find a visitor there; I had simply arranged to meet Max there at 8 (as usual I arrived an hour late) to discuss with him the sequence of my stories to which I had paid no attention till then, although the manuscript had to be sent off the following morning.[13] And there I found a visitor, which rather annoyed me. On the other hand, I was not in the least taken aback by this visitor.[14] Before I was introduced, I offered you my hand across the large table, although you barely rose and probably had no desire to shake my hand. I just glanced at you casually, sat down, and everything seemed to be all right; you hardly made me feel even the slight animation that strangers in a familiar setting invariably produce in me. Having once accepted the fact that I could not go through the manuscript with Max, handing around the Thalia photographs made for a very pleasant diversion. (Now that I am so

far away from you, I could kick myself for using that word which describes so well the impression I had at the time.) You took the pictures very seriously, and glanced up only when Otto gave some explanation or I handed you another picture. A comic misunderstanding arose when one of us, I don't remember who, began explaining a picture. To look at the photographs you had stopped eating, and when Max made some remark about the food, you said in so many words that there was nothing more abhorrent to you than people who were constantly eating. In the middle of this the bell (it is now hours later, 11 P.M., the time when my own work usually begins, but I cannot get away from this letter) well, the bell rang, and you were telling us about the opening scene of an operetta, *The Autogirl*,[15] which you had seen at the Residenz Theater. (Is there a Residenz Theater? And was it an operetta?) There were 15 people on the stage, and from an anteroom where a telephone could be heard someone appeared and called upon each person in turn to answer the telephone, using the same phrase each time. I still remember the phrase, but am ashamed to write it down because I cannot pronounce it properly, let alone write it down, although at the time I not only heard it quite plainly but also read it from your lips, and although it has meanwhile passed through my head many times in the constant search for its correct formulation. I don't remember how after this (no, before—because I was still sitting near the door, diagonally opposite you) the conversation turned to thrashings and brothers and sisters. The names of several members of your family of whom I had never heard were mentioned, including the name Ferry (might he be your brother?),[16] and you were telling us that as a little girl you had often been beaten by brothers and cousins (also by Herr Friedmann?), and that you had felt almost defenseless against it. You ran your hand down your left arm, which in those days had been covered with bruises. But you didn't look at all sorry for yourself, and although I cannot account for it, I could not imagine how anyone could have dared to beat you, however little you may have been.—Then you remarked quite casually, while examining or reading something (you did not

look up nearly often enough, and after all, it was such a short evening), that you had studied Hebrew. While on the one hand I marveled at this, on the other (these are only the opinions formed at the time, and they have passed through a fine sieve since then) I would have preferred you not to have mentioned it with such exaggerated casualness, and so I was secretly delighted when later on you were unable to translate Tel Aviv.—Then it also transpired that you are a Zionist, and this suited me very well.—Still in the same room there was some discussion about your job, and Frau Brod mentioned a pretty batiste dress she had seen in your hotel room, for I think you were on your way to some wedding (I am doing more guessing than remembering) which was to take place in Budapest.[17]—When you got up it turned out that you were wearing Frau Brod's slippers, because your shoes had to be dried. The weather had been terrible all day. These slippers bothered you a bit, and while walking through the dark center room, you told me you were used to slippers with heels. Such slippers were new to me.—In the music room you sat opposite me, and I began to spread out my manuscript. Everyone offered me funny advice as to how it should be mailed, but I can no longer remember the advice you gave. What I do remember is something which happened in the other room and which so amazed me that I banged the table. You actually said you enjoyed copying manuscripts, that you had also been copying manuscripts in Berlin for some gentleman (curse the sound of that word when unaccompanied by name and explanation!) and you asked Max to send you some manuscripts.—The best I accomplished that evening was that I happened to have with me a copy of *Palästina*,[18] for which I should be forgiven everything. The trip to Palestine was discussed, and it was then that you offered to shake my hand, or rather, thanks to an inspiration, I extracted it from you. —During the piano playing I sat diagonally behind you; you had your legs crossed and kept plucking at your coiffure which I can no longer visualize from the front; all I know is that while the piano was being played, your hair stuck out a little at the sides.—Later, however, a great dispersal took place: Frau Brod dozed on the sofa, Herr Brod busied himself at the bookshelves, Otto fidgeted with the

fire screen. Max's books were discussed, you said something about *Arnold Beer*,[19] mentioned a review in *Ost und West*,[20] and finally, while turning the pages of a volume in the Propyläen edition of Goethe's works, you said you had started to read *Nornepygge Castle*,[21] but hadn't been able to finish it. At this remark I really froze with horror—for myself, for you, for everyone. Wasn't this an unnecessary, inexplicable affront? And yet you carried through this seemingly irretrievable situation like a heroine, while we all stared at your head, bent over the book. It turned out to be not an affront, indeed not even the mildest criticism, but simply a fact which you yourself found surprising, and which made you decide to try the book again some time. The impasse could not have been resolved more handsomely, and I thought we all had good reason to feel slightly ashamed of ourselves.—As a diversion, Director Brod produced the illustrated volume of the Propyläen edition and announced that he would show you Goethe in his underwear. You quoted: "He is still a king, even in his underwear,"[22] and this quotation was the only thing I disliked about you that evening. My displeasure almost gave me a contraction of the throat, and in fact I should have asked myself why I felt so involved. But I am never consistent.—I could not get over the speed with which you finally scurried out of the room, and returned in your shoes. But I did not like the comparison to a gazelle that Frau Brod made twice.—I still remember very clearly the way you put on your hat and stuck in the hatpins. The hat was rather large, and white underneath.—Out in the street I lapsed at once into one of my not altogether unusual states of semitrance, when I see nothing clearly, except my own worthlessness. On Perlgasse, perhaps to relieve my awkward silence, you asked where I lived, and quite naturally wanted to know whether my way home and yours to your hotel were the same; but I, miserable fool that I am, asked if you wanted my address, evidently assuming that you—having hardly arrived in Berlin and fired by the idea of the trip to Palestine—would at once want to write to me, and so were loath to run the risk of finding yourself in the desperate position of not having my address. This blunder, needless to say, disconcerted me for the rest of the way, insofar as there was

anything within me to be disconcerted.—Even in the first room and again in the street, there was some talk of a man in your Prague branch who had taken you that afternoon by carriage to Hradčany Castle. The existence of this man seemed to make it impossible for me to see you off at the station next morning with flowers, which I had been considering vaguely for some time. The early hour of your departure, the impossibility of buying flowers at such a time, made renunciation easier.—On Obstgasse and along the Graben, Director Brod did most of the talking, while you told the story of how your mother has the front door opened in answer to your clapping—a story, incidentally, for which you still owe me an explanation. Otherwise, the time was shamefully wasted comparing the traffic in Prague with that in Berlin. If I am not mistaken, mention was also made of your having had a snack at the Repräsentationshaus[23] opposite your hotel. Finally Herr Brod gave you some advice about your journey and named several stations where you could get something to eat. You intended to have breakfast in the dining car. It was then that I heard you had left your umbrella on the train, and this trifling detail (trifling for me) added a new dimension to my picture of you.—That you had not yet packed, and still intended to read in bed, made me uneasy. During the previous night you had read until four in the morning. As reading matter for the journey you had brought: Björnson's *Flags Are Flying in Town and Harbor* and Andersen's *Picture-Book Without Pictures.* At the time I felt I should have guessed you would bring these books, which of course I could never have succeeded in doing. On entering the hotel some sort of embarrassment made me crowd into your section of the revolving door, and I very nearly trod on your feet.—Then the three of us stood for a moment in front of the waiter near the elevator in which you were to disappear almost at once, and the door of which was already being opened. You then had a brief and very haughty conversation with the waiter, the sound of which, if I pause for an instant, still rings in my ears. It was not easy to convince you that a car would be unnecessary to go to the nearby station. You had thought you were leaving from the Franz Josef station.—We then said our last farewells, and in the clumsiest possible way I again

mentioned the trip to Palestine; and it struck me only then that I had mentioned this trip, which probably only I took seriously, far too many times during the course of the evening.

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With only trifling, unimportant but numerous omissions, these are roughly all the outward events of that evening that I still remember —after probably more than 30 other evenings spent meanwhile with the Brod family, which unfortunately may have blurred certain things. I have written them down to counter your remark that little notice was taken of you that evening, and also because I have resisted far too long the desire to write down my memories of that evening before they are forgotten. But the very sight of this quantity of paper covered in writing will fill you with dismay; first, you will curse the remark that caused it; then you will curse yourself for having to read it all; then some faint curiosity may perhaps make you read on to the end, by which time your tea will be completely cold; and finally you will be in such a bad temper that you'll swear by everything you hold dear that in no circumstances would you supplement my recollections with any of yours; in your annoyance, however, you won't consider that supplementing involves less trouble than the initial recording, and that by this contribution you would give me far more pleasure than I have succeeded in giving you by this first collection of material.—But now I really must leave you in peace, and end by asking you to accept my kindest regards.

Yours, Franz K.

Still not the end, and what's more, a question difficult to answer: How long can chocolate be kept before it goes bad?

October 29, 1912

Dear Fräulein Bauer,

Now to something very important, even if in great haste. (This is no longer written from the office, for my office work defies my writing to you; that kind of work is completely foreign to me, and

bears no relation to my real needs.) You must not think that with an endless letter, such as that of the day before yesterday, for which I have amply reproached myself already, I mean to rob you not only of your time for reading, but also of your time for resting, and want to commit you to a prompt and detailed reply; I should have to be ashamed of myself if after your strenuous day's work I came to plague your evenings. That is not the object of my letters, not by any means; but surely this is obvious, and you won't have interpreted it otherwise. Only—and this is most important—and this is most important (so important that in my haste it becomes a litany)—that you should not write long letters, even on those evenings when, regardless of my letters, you feel like writing. No matter how pleasant I imagine your office to be—are you alone in a room?—I no longer want to feel that I have kept you there until late in the evening. Five lines, yes, you could write that much every now and again in the evening, yet in spite of myself I cannot suppress the cruel remark that five lines can be written more often than long letters. The sight of your letters at the door—they now arrive around noon—could make me forget all consideration for you, but reading the time of day, or thinking that I may have deprived you of a walk, that again is intolerable. Have I the right to dissuade you from taking Pyramidon, since I am partly to blame for your headaches? When do you usually go for walks? Gym twice a week, the professor three times—it must have been in the lost letter that you wrote about him—how much free time is left after all that? And needlework on Sunday, whatever for? Can it really please your mother, if she knows that you have to use your leisure for it? Especially as it appears from your letters that your mother is your best friend, and gay as well.—I wish you would let me know about all this in five lines, so that rather than having to write and think about it any more, we could look at and listen to each other calmly, without self-reproach, you in your goodness and understanding, I in the way I must.

Yours, Franz K.

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

October 31, 1912

Dear Fräulein Bauer,

Just look, how many impossibilities there are in our letters. Can I remove the flavor of nauseating false generosity from my request that you write me only five lines? That is impossible. And is my request not sincere? Certainly it is sincere. And is it not perhaps also insincere? Of course it is insincere, and how insincere it is! When at last a letter arrives—after the door to my room has opened a thousand times to admit, not the man with the letter, but innumerable people whose calm expressions torment me because they feel themselves to be in the right place, whereas only the man with the letter, and no one else, has the right to appear—when at last the letter arrives, then I think for a while I can be calm, that I shall be satisfied by it and that the day will go well. But then I have read it, there is more in it than I might ever have expected to learn; the letter has obviously taken up your whole evening, and perhaps there was hardly time for your walk down Leipziger Strasse; I read the letter once, put it aside, and read it again; I pick up a file but am really only reading your letter; I am with the typist, to whom I am supposed to dictate, and again your letter slowly slides through my fingers and I have begun to draw it out of my pocket when people ask me something and I know perfectly well I should not be thinking of your letter now, yet that thought is all that occurs to me—but after all that I am as hungry as before, as restless as before, and once again the door starts swinging merrily, as though the man with the letter were about to appear again. That is what you call the "little pleasure" your letters give me. This answers your question, whether it is disagreeable for me to get a letter from you every day at the office. Needless to say it is almost impossible in any way to associate the arrival of your letters with my work at the office, but it is just as impossible to work and to wait in vain for a letter, or to work and wonder whether there may be a letter at home. Impossibilities on every side! And yet it is not so bad, for lately I have managed other impossibilities in my office work; one must not

prostrate oneself before the minor impossibilities, otherwise the major impossibilities would never come into view.

Today I should not complain at all, for your last two letters arrived within only two hours of each other, and of course I cursed the mail for yesterday's incompetence, as much as I praise it today.

But I am not answering anything, and am hardly asking questions, and all because the pleasure of writing to you, although I am not at once aware of it, invests all my letters to you with a sense of infinity, which means of course that nothing essential need be said on the first few pages. But wait, tomorrow I hope (I hope for my sake) to have time enough to answer all questions at one go, and to ask so many questions that for the moment at least my heart will feel lighter.

Today I will only add that at the point in your letter that deals with your hat, I bit my tongue. So it was black underneath? Where were my eyes? And it was by no means unimportant to me. But then the whole crown must have been white, and that might have confused me, as I had to look down on it because of my height. Also, you bent your head a little while putting on the hat. In short, there are excuses as usual, but I should not have written about something I was not completely sure of.

With warmest greetings, and I kiss your hand, if that is permitted.

Yours, Franz K.

November 1, 1912

Dear Fräulein Felice,

You must not take offense at this form of address, at least not this time, for if I am to write about my mode of life, as you have asked me to do several times, I shall probably have some delicate things to say which I could hardly utter to a "Fräulein Bauer." Moreover this new form of address cannot be so very bad, or I should not have thought it out with so much and such lasting satisfaction.

My life consists, and basically always has consisted, of attempts at writing, mostly unsuccessful. But when I didn't write, I was at once

flat on the floor, fit for the dustbin. My energies have always been pitifully weak; even though I didn't quite realize it, it soon became evident that I had to spare myself on all sides, renounce a little everywhere, in order to retain just enough strength for what seemed to me my main purpose. When I didn't do so (oh God, even on a holiday[24] such as this, when I am acting as duty officer, there is no peace, just visitor after visitor, like a little hell let loose) but tried to reach beyond my strength, I was automatically forced back, wounded, humbled, forever weakened; yet this very fact which made me temporarily unhappy is precisely what gave me confidence in the long run, and I began to think that somewhere, however difficult to find, there must be a lucky star under which it would be possible to go on living. I once drew up a detailed list of the things I have sacrificed to writing, as well as the things that were taken from me for the sake of writing, or rather whose loss was only made bearable by this explanation.[25]

Just as I am thin, and I am the thinnest person I know (and that's saying something, for I am no stranger to sanatoria), there is also nothing to me which, in relation to writing, one could call superfluous, superfluous in the sense of overflowing. If there is a higher power that wishes to use me, or does use me, then I am at its mercy, if no more than as a well-prepared instrument. If not, I am nothing, and will suddenly be abandoned in a dreadful void.

Now I have expanded my life to accommodate my thoughts about you, and there is hardly a quarter of an hour of my waking time when I haven't thought about you, and many quarter-hours when I do nothing else. But even this is related to my writing, my life is determined by nothing but the ups and downs of writing, and certainly during a barren period I should never have had the courage to turn to you. This is just as true as it is true that since that evening I have felt as though I had an opening in my chest through which there was an unrestrained drawing-in and drawing-out until one evening in bed, when, by calling to mind a story from the Bible, the necessity of this sensation, as well as the truth of the Bible story, were simultaneously confirmed.

Lately I have found to my amazement how intimately you have now become associated with my writing, although until recently I believed that the only time I did not think about you at all was while I was writing. In one short paragraph I had written, there were, among others, the following references to you and your letters: Someone was given a bar of chocolate. There was talk of small diversions someone had during working hours. Then there was a telephone call. And finally somebody urged someone to go to bed, and threatened to take him straight to his room if he did not obey, which was certainly prompted by the recollection of your mother's annoyance when you stayed so late at the office.[26]—Such passages are especially dear to me; in them I take hold of you, without your feeling it, and therefore without your having to resist. And even if you were to read some of my writings, these little details would surely escape you. But believe me, probably nowhere in the world could you let yourself be caught with greater unconcern than here.

My mode of life is devised solely for writing, and if there are any changes, then only for the sake of perhaps fitting in better with my writing; for time is short, my strength is limited, the office is a horror, the apartment is noisy, and if a pleasant, straightforward life is not possible then one must try to wriggle through by subtle maneuvers. The satisfaction gained by maneuvering one's timetable successfully cannot be compared to the permanent misery of knowing that fatigue of any kind shows itself better and more clearly in writing than anything one is really trying to say. For the past six weeks, with some interruptions in the last few days, due to unbearable weakness, my timetable has been as follows: from 8 to 2 or 2:30 in the office, then lunch till 3 or 3:30, after that sleep in bed (usually only attempts: for a whole week I saw nothing but Montenegrins in my sleep, in extremely disagreeable clarity, which gave me headaches, I saw every detail of their complicated dress) till 7:30, then ten minutes of exercises, naked at the open window, then an hour's walk—alone, with Max, or with another friend, then dinner with my family (I have three sisters, one married, one engaged; the single one, without prejudicing my affection for the others, is easily my favorite);[27] then at 10:30 (but often not till

11:30) I sit down to write, and I go on, depending on my strength, inclination, and luck, until 1, 2, or 3 o'clock, once even till 6 in the morning. Then again exercises, as above, but of course avoiding all exertions, a wash, and then, usually with a slight pain in my heart and twitching stomach muscles, to bed. Then every imaginable effort to get to sleep—i.e., to achieve the impossible, for one cannot sleep (Herr K. even demands dreamless sleep) and at the same time be thinking about one's work and trying to solve with certainty the one question that certainly is insoluble, namely, whether there will be a letter from you the next day, and at what time. Thus the night consists of two parts: one wakeful, the other sleepless, and if I were to tell you about it at length and you were prepared to listen, I should never finish. So it is hardly surprising if, at the office the next morning, I only just manage to start work with what little strength is left. In one of the corridors along which I always walk to reach my typist, there used to be a coffinlike trolley for the moving of files and documents, and each time I passed it I felt as though it had been made for me, and was waiting for me.

To be precise, I must not forget that I am not only a clerk, but also a manufacturer. For my brother-in-law owns an asbestos factory, and I (although only through money my father put into it) am a partner, and as such am on the board. This factory has already caused me enough pain and worry, but I don't want to talk about that now;[28] in any case, I have neglected it for some time (i.e., I withhold my anyway useless collaboration) as much as I can, and more or less get by with it.

Once again I have told you so little, and have asked no questions, and once again I must close. But not a single answer and, even more certainly, not a single question shall be lost. There exists some kind of sorcery by which two people, without seeing each other, without talking to each other, can at least discover the greater part about each other's past, literally in a flash, without having to tell each other all and everything; but this, after all, is almost an instrument of Black Magic (without seeming to be) which, although never without reward, one would certainly never resort to with impunity. Therefore I won't say it, unless you guess it first. It is terribly short,

like all magic formulas. Farewell, and let me reinforce this greeting by lingering over your hand.

Yours, Franz K.

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

October [November] 2, 1912

Dear Fräulein Bauer,

What's this? You too get tired? It is highly disconcerting to think of you tired and alone in the evening at the office. What do you wear at the office? And what does the main part of your work consist of? Do you write or dictate? And yet yours must be a superior position, if you have to talk to so many people, for the junior employee has to sit silently at his desk.[29] I had already guessed that your office is attached to a factory, but what does it produce? Just Parlographs? Does anyone actually buy them? I am happy to be able to dictate (except on the rare occasions when I do my own typing) to a live human being (this is my main function) who now and then, when I can't think of anything, drops off for a moment or stretches his limbs or lights his pipe, and lets me look quietly out of the window. Or who, as he did today, for example, when I rebuked him for writing too slowly, tried to placate me by reminding me that I had received a letter. Is there a Parlograph that can do that? I remember some time ago a Dictaphone (I wasn't prejudiced then, as I am now, against the products of your competitors) being demonstrated to us, and how extremely boring and impractical I found it. So I can't quite visualize this kind of business, and can only hope that it is in fact organized in as pointless and airy a way as I imagine, and that your life in the firm is correspondingly easy and effortless. By the way, I cannot find your Prague branch, which according to my recollection of one of your remarks should be on Obstgasse or Ferdinandstrasse. I have looked for it several times, in the hope that the firm's nameplate would offer some sign or idea of you.

To describe my work at the office gives me little pleasure. As such, it is not worth your knowing about, nor worth my writing about, for it leaves me neither time nor peace to write to you, makes me as fidgety and stupid as I am at the moment, and the thought of you incites in me a desire for revenge that gives me real pleasure.

Farewell. Tomorrow will probably be a quiet Sunday, so I will write a lot. And don't work yourself to exhaustion! Don't make me sad!—And this I write on the very day on which you will have received my moaning letter. How weak we all are!

Yours, Franz K.

November 3, 1912

Dear Fräulein Felice,

My nephew[30] is crying next door, my mother keeps saying to him in Czech "good boy" and then "little boy"; it is already 6 o'clock in the evening; no, the clock says it is 6:30; I stayed too long with Max this afternoon; he read me two chapters of a new story, "From a Sewing School,"[31] it is well done and full of feminine sentiments, and yet in places it passed me by, preoccupied as I was in getting to this letter, to which, if I calculate correctly, I have been drawn ever since 2 A.M., the moment I stopped my own work. But by now it is so late, my tyrannical timetable actually demands that I should have been asleep for a whole hour; moreover, this is the last comparatively quiet time in the apartment before everybody goes to sleep; finally, printer's proofs[32] have been lying on my table for some days and I have not even looked at them. They should be sent off tomorrow and will probably deprive me of the few remaining evening- and night-hours. For all these mainly stupid reasons this won't be as methodical a letter as I had wished it to be and as befits a Sunday. But for all these reasons, including the last, I am discontented and sad, and from the kitchen the tiny kitten's squeaks come as though from my heart. In addition to all this, I haven't had a letter from you, indeed I couldn't have expected one, since your letters always arrive by the second mail, and there is no second

delivery on Sundays, so at best I shall get it tomorrow morning, after the long night.—In these circumstances and as a small compensation for all this, can anyone prevent me from addressing you as I have done above? And isn't this form of address so fitting, in part and in its entirety, that, once used, it can never again be abandoned?

Dear Fräulein Felice, how have you spent this beautiful, terribly short Sunday? If you were one of those people who are affected by someone thinking of you, you would have woken up with a start in the middle of the night; reading in bed in the morning the lines would have become blurred; at breakfast your eyes would have strayed beyond your cocoa and rolls, and even beyond your mother; the orchids you were taking to a new apartment would have petrified in your hand, and only now with *Schilling's Flight*[33] would you be left in peace, for now I am not thinking of you, rather I am with you. Yet I am not with you, for as I put that full stop I heard my father, who had just come home, talking in the next room, divulging some very bad business news; I went in and for a few moments stood around sadly and absentmindedly with my father and mother.

In the last few days I have thought of two further additions to the evening we spent together, the one I found by chance in a letter of yours, the other I thought of myself.

You actually told me then, and I don't understand how I could have forgotten, that staying alone in a hotel made you feel uncomfortable. I probably replied that I on the contrary felt very much at ease in a hotel room. This really is a fact; I noticed it particularly last year, when I had to travel for some time in the depths of winter through towns and villages in northern Bohemia. To have to oneself the expanse of a hotel room with its easily surveyed four walls and a door that can be locked; the knowledge that specific items of one's belongings are tucked away into specific corners of cupboards, on tables and coat hangers, always gives me a vague sensation of a new, unspent existence charged with vigor and destined for better things, which may of course be nothing but a despair driven beyond itself and finding itself at home in the cold

grave of a hotel room. In any case, I have always felt at ease in them, and of almost all hotel rooms I have stayed in I have nothing but good to report. On the whole probably neither of us travels a great deal. But what about this uneasiness that prevents you even from going up the stairs to your apartment alone at night? Besides, your apartment must be fairly low, or how could one hear people in the street clapping their hands (I don't understand how one can hear it at all through closed windows)? And you don't want to face going up those few stairs by yourself? You, who appear so calm and confident! No, I can't be satisfied with what you wrote about opening the front door to the house.

There was also some talk that evening about the Yiddish theater. Although you had once seen a performance of that sort, you could not remember the name of the play. I believe that just now such a company is playing in Berlin, and with them is my great friend, a certain Y. Löwy.[34] Incidentally, it was he who during the long wait between your first and second letters, unintentionally but well deserving of my thanks, sent me a little news of you. He does write me very often and sends me pictures, posters, newspaper clippings, etc. Once he sent me a poster of the company's guest appearance in Leipzig. I left it lying on my desk, still folded, hardly having looked at it. But as is the way with things on desks, what's at the bottom sometimes happens to appear on top, and so one day this very poster (and no other) was lying on top, and what's more, unfolded! This mere chance was followed by another; I read the poster carefully, for there are some quite amusing things on it (an actress, married and elderly—whom I greatly admire, by the way—is referred to as a "primadonna," and Löwy even calls himself a "dramatist"), but down in the corner, coming as a shock, I saw the name of the Immanuelkirchstrasse in Berlin N.E., where the poster was printed. And today, out of gratitude—now that fortunately I don't have to be content with such news of you—I wonder whether you might like to see those actors, about whom, incidentally, I could talk to you by the hour. I am not absolutely positive that they are playing in Berlin now, but according to a postcard from Löwy, which is lying around somewhere on my table, I think I can assume

they are. I feel sure you would like this man very much, at least for a quarter of an hour. If it would amuse you, you could have him called out either before or after the performance, gain his confidence by referring to me, and listen to him for a while. I love the Yiddish theater; last year I may have gone to 20 of their performances, and possibly not once to the German theater.—But what I have written here is not a plea for you to go there; no, honestly it isn't. You have better theaters in Berlin, and perhaps, or most probably, the almost certain shabbiness of the theater itself would make it impossible for you to go there. I even feel like tearing up every word I have written about it, from which I ask you to conclude that I by no means advise you to go.

And am I to end that part of Sunday which I spend writing to you on this note? But it's getting late, and later, and if I am to get any sleep before my nightly stint, I shall have to hurry. One thing is certain: I should not get any if it weren't for this letter, however unsatisfactory it may be.

And now farewell. That wretched post office, your letter may have been in Prague all day, and I am deprived of it! Farewell.

Yours, Franz K.

It is now past midnight, I have actually done nothing but correct the proofs; I haven't slept, and I have written nothing for myself. But it really is too late to begin now, especially since I have not slept, and so I shall go to bed with my suppressed restlessness, and fight for sleep. You must have been asleep for some time, and it is unfair of me to jeopardize your sleep with this little postscript. But I have just glanced at your last letter again and wonder whether you shouldn't give up your work with the professor. I still don't know what kind of work it is, but even if he were to dictate the most precious words night after night, it wouldn't be worth while, if it tired you. And now I say goodnight to you, and you respond with your even breathing.

Yours, Franz K.

November 4, 1912

It is now 10:30 on Monday morning. I have been waiting for a letter since 10:30 on Saturday morning, but again nothing has come. I have written every day (this isn't in the least a reproach, for it has made me happy) but don't I deserve even a word? One single word? Even if it were only to say "I never want to hear from you again." Besides, I thought today's letter would contain some kind of decision, but the nonarrival of a letter is also a little decision. Had a letter arrived, I would have answered it at once, and the answer would be bound to have begun with a complaint about the length of those two endless days. But you leave me sitting wretchedly at my wretched desk!

November 5, 1912

Dear Fräulein Felice,

If you always want me to write about things as they really are, then you will find it easy to forgive yesterday's wicked, superfluous, panic-stricken letter, for things were in fact word for word as written on that scrap of paper. Today of course your last two letters arrived, one early, the other at 10; I have no right whatever to complain, I even have the promise of a letter every day (hark, my heart, a letter every day!) and must be thankful if you forgive me. I just want to implore you, when you have finished a letter to me, don't make me suffer for your not happening to have a stamp; just drop it recklessly in the mailbox without a stamp.

The pity is that unless it's a Sunday I can hardly ever write to you except during my dullest hours, between 3 and 4 o'clock. It is seldom possible in the office—how I have to restrain myself after reading a letter from you!—but if I were not to write to you now, my dissatisfaction would allow me no sleep at all, nor would you get my letter the following day—and in the evening my timetable is too crowded.

Anyway I gather from your letter that even on holidays I write in an unreasonable way. My heart may be comparatively sound, but

for any human heart to stand up to the sorrows of bad writing and the joys of good writing is not easy. I was in sanatoria only on account of my stomach and my general weakness, not forgetting my self-enamored hypochondria. One day I shall have to write at length about all this. No, I don't believe famous doctors; I believe doctors only when they tell me that they don't know anything, and anyway I hate them (I hope you don't love one). I would gladly have a free, peaceful life in Berlin prescribed for me, but where is a doctor with such authority to be found? And the Immanuel-Kirchstrasse must be the very place for tired people. I can describe it to you. Listen: "From the Alexander Platz you follow a long but not very busy street, Prenzloer Strasse, Prenzloer Allee, with many narrow side streets. One of these streets is the Immanuel-Kirchstrasse. Quiet, secluded, far from the constant bustle of Berlin. The first building in this street is an ordinary church. Opposite stands house No. 37, very narrow and high. The street is also very narrow. When I'm there, it's always calm, quiet, and I ask myself: Is this still Berlin?" This is how the actor Löwy describes your street in a letter I received yesterday. The last question I find poetic, and the whole thing a faithful description. I asked him for it some time ago, without giving a reason, and he wrote to me in similar fashion, without further questions. As a matter of fact, I really wanted to hear about No. 30 (and now I discover you're at No. 29, if I'm not mistaken); I don't know why he chose No. 37 for me. But come to think of it: the printers of that poster may be in that building. According to this last letter it seems that the company gave their last Berlin performance on Sunday, but as far as I can gather from the letter, there may be another performance next Sunday. I tell you this simply to correct my earlier statement, and with all the reservations I made when I suggested a visit to this theater.

Incidentally, the magic word appeared in your last letter but one, and doesn't know it. It is lost there among many others, and I fear that in our letters it will never achieve the position it deserves, for on no account will I say it first, and you of course, even if you were to guess it, would not be the first to utter it. Just as well, perhaps,

for after this word had had its effect, you would discover in me things you could not like, and what should I do then?

Above all, you would take a different view of my writing and my attitude to writing, and would no longer advise moderation. Human weakness alone provides enough moderation. Shouldn't I stake all I have on the one thing I can do? What a hopeless fool I should be if I didn't! My writing may be worthless; in which case, I am definitely and without doubt utterly worthless. If I spare myself in this respect, I am not really sparing myself, I am committing suicide. By the way, how old do you think I am? There may have been some talk about it that evening, I don't know, but perhaps you did not notice.

Farewell, go on feeling well disposed toward me, and keep putting aside unfinished letters to Frau Sophie. I like Frau F[riedmann] very much, but not enough to let her have your letters. No, we don't correspond. I have written her only 3 letters, the first: complaint on your account; the second: anxiety on your account; the third: thanks on your account. Adieu!

Yours, Franz K.

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

October [November] 6, 1912

Dear Fräulein Felice, you are being torn to pieces before my very eyes! Don't you see too many people, unnecessarily many? It wouldn't matter in the least if you had more time. Don't you do some jobs, pay visits, go to certain parties, which result in nothing but restlessness? I am being rather professorial, without knowing or understanding much about the situation, but in your last letter you sounded so nervous that one longed to seize your hand for a moment. I am not against anything specific, not against the pleasant temptations at the professor's (although I did raise an eyebrow at the "water and gas"), nor against the anniversary celebration—by the way, at these parties group photographs are often taken; they can easily be handed out as presents without specifically offering a

photograph of oneself, and at the same time give great pleasure to someone far away, if one so wishes.

What I said about the Yiddish theater was certainly not meant to be ironical; I may have laughed at it, but that is part of loving. I even made a short introductory speech in front of what now seems like a countless number of people; then Löwy came on, acted, sang, and recited.[35] Unfortunately the money they made from this countless number was not correspondingly uncountable. Of the Berlin performance I know no more than when I wrote yesterday, for Löwy's last letter contained nothing but complaints and despair. One of his complaints—the impossibility of earning any money in Berlin on weekdays—is a reproach I must not conceal from a Berliner. Apart from this, Löwy, given his way, is a man of continuous enthusiasm, known in Eastern Europe as a "hot Jew." At the moment, however, he is for several reasons—although far from boring, too long a story to tell here—terribly unhappy, and the worst of it is that I have no idea how to help him.

Why I hoped to get your letter on Sunday is easy to explain. I just went to the office to look, but at first I wasn't really disappointed. I thumbed through the mail absentmindedly rather than hopefully. My home address is Niklasstrasse 36. But what, please, is yours? On the backs of your letters I have seen three different addresses. Is it in fact No. 29? Does it annoy you to get registered letters? I send them not only because I am anxious, though that is one of the reasons, but because I feel they are more likely to come straight to you, instead of aimlessly shuttling about, like those ordinary letters that sadly ply their way; and I always imagine the outstretched hand of a smart Berlin mailman who, if necessary, would force the letter upon you, even if you were to resist. A dependent man cannot have too many allies.—Farewell! I am proud that this letter contains not a single complaint, nice as it may be to complain to you.

Yours, Franz K.

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

November 7, 1912

Dear Fräulein Felice,

Yesterday I pretended to be worried about you, and tried hard to give you advice. But instead what am I doing? Tormenting you? I don't mean intentionally, that would be inconceivable, yet even if I were it would have evaporated, faced by your last letter, like evil faced by good, but I am tormenting you by my existence, my very existence. Fundamentally I am unchanged, keep turning in circles, have acquired but one more unfulfilled longing to add to my other unfulfilled ones; and a new kind of self-confidence, perhaps the strongest I ever had, has been given to me within my general sense of lostness. But you are restless and disturbed, you cry in your dreams, which is worse than lying awake and staring at the ceiling, you have changed since that evening when you looked at everyone so calmly; now you flit from one thing to another, in one letter you mention 20 people, in another none. In short, the gains are unjustly, most unjustly distributed between us. (What are you doing, sitting opposite me now in this quiet room, even though it does belong to you!)

I repeat: the fault lies not within me—what am I, after all?—the fault lies in the one thing to which my unconscious striving has always been and still is directed, a direction in which it has to drive you too if it is not to lose you. Oh, what a dismal outrage I am condemned to commit upon your nature!

After a long interruption (If only I had time, if only I had time! I would be calm and see things in the right perspective. I would know how to write to you more carefully. I would never offend you as I am doing now, though there is nothing I would rather avoid. I would be calm, would not tremble over my files at the thought of you, as I did a few moments ago at my office, nor would I be sitting now in the comparative quiet of this room, staring apathetically out of the window through half-drawn curtains. And even if we go on writing each other every day, will there be days other than today, and a destiny other than to pursue the impossible, to be torn asunder by force, and by the same force to be held together?)

I could only mention the interruption, nothing else. It is now afternoon, even late afternoon. On re-reading your letter, it occurs to me that I know nothing whatever about your early life; I can only just disentangle your face from the ivy out of which you peered across the fields when you were a little girl. There is hardly any way of finding out other than through the written word. Make no mistake about that. If I arrived in person you would find me insufferable. What I was like on the way to the hotel: that's me. My mode of life, though it has cured my stomach, would seem to you crazy and intolerable. For months on end, until he grew used to it, my father had to hide his face behind the newspaper while I ate my supper.[36] For some years now my clothes have been very untidy. The same suit does for the office, the street, my desk at home—yes, even for summer and winter. I can stand up to the cold almost better than a chunk of wood, but that in itself would hardly be a reason for going about as I do—for example, even now in November, not wearing an overcoat, neither a light nor a heavy one, walking around among well-wrapped pedestrians like a lunatic in a summer suit and little summer hat, on principle without a vest (I am the inventor of vestless attire); as for the indescribable peculiarities of my linen, the less said the better. Imagine the shock you'd get if, near the church which I picture at the beginning of your street, you were to run into such a person! There are several explanations for my habits (apart from the fact that I am incomparably healthier since I adopted them), but you wouldn't accept a single one, above all because anything healthy about my mode of life (needless to say, I neither smoke nor drink alcohol, coffee, or tea, and as a rule—and this atones for my hypocritical silence—I eat no chocolate either) is undermined by lack of sleep. Dearest Fräulein Felice, please don't turn your back on me for all that, nor try to improve me in this respect, but tolerate me in a kindly way across this great distance. For you see, last night for example, I came in from the freezing cold in my usual attire, sat down to my supper (which hardly varies from day to day), listened to my brother-in-law and to the one who will soon acquire that status; then, while goodbyes were being said in the hall (I now have supper between 9:30 and 10), I was left alone

in the room and was seized with such longing for you that all I wanted to do was lay my head on the table for some kind of support.

You take me for much younger than I am, I almost feel like concealing my years, for their great number only emphasizes all that disturbs you about me. Actually I am almost a year older than Max, and will be 30 on July 3rd. I do look like a boy, however, and depending on the perspicacity of the uninitiated onlooker I am taken for anything between 18 and 25.

Yesterday I said something about the professor that could be interpreted as arrogance—shish, it is nothing but jealousy. It's only today that, to my way of thinking, at least, I have something against him, since he advises you to read Binding.[37] I know only very little of his work, but I haven't read a line that isn't false and highfalutin. And this is what he sends into your dreams!—And now quickly: Why do you jump off running trams? Next time you try, my look of horror will rise before your eyes. And the oculist? And your headaches? Unless your next letter starts with answers to these questions, I won't read it.

Yours, Franz K.

November 8, 1912

Dear Fräulein Felice,

Your last letter but two (not as you say your "last letters") confused me; it really did, but I didn't know it had been as bad as your last letter now makes me believe. Am I really so unsure of myself? And my hidden impatience, my incurable dissatisfaction, do they tremble visibly in the strokes of my pen? And must I let myself be told by my own letters what I mean? How dismal everything around me is! And I am trying to drag you into this with all my might!

I don't know if you have a true picture of my life, which would enable you to comprehend my sensibility, that irritability which is always at the ready, but which, once it has been set free, leaves me

behind like a stone. I have read your letter at least 20 times, several times immediately after its arrival; several times while in front of the typewriter; then, while a client was sitting at my desk, I read your letter as though I had just received it; I read it in the street, and now at home. But I don't know what to do, and feel powerless. Were I with you I would remain silent; but since we are separated, I must write, or I shall die of grief. Who knows whether I don't need the touch of that hand more than you do, not the hand that soothes, but the hand that gives strength. Yesterday my weariness was so intense I was ready to die, and after many indecisions decided to abandon writing during the night. Instead, I walked the streets for two hours, returning home only when my hands were frozen stiff in my pockets. Then I slept solidly for nearly 6 hours, and have only a vague recollection of a dream, involving you and some unhappy incident. This is the first time I have dreamt of you and remembered it—which reminds me: the only time I woke during the night, and then only for a moment, was from this dream. In the morning I was awakened before the usual hour; our governess[38] came storming into the apartment, and with a scream, which sounded in my half-awake state like a truly maternal scream, she announced that soon after midnight my sister had given birth to a girl.[39] I stayed in bed a little longer—even in cases of emergency I can't be forcibly woken up, what does wake me is the general noise behind every door—trying to understand our governess' friendly interest in this birth, since I, the brother and uncle, felt not the slightest amity—only envy, nothing but passionate envy of my sister, or rather of my brother-in-law, for I shall never have a child; this is even more certain than—(I will not needlessly mention a greater misfortune).

So this is how cheerful I am after a good night's sleep and an evening wasted through absurd caution. Dearest Fräulein Felice!

Yours, Franz K.

*On the back of a sample page of "Children on a Country Road"*[40]

November 8, 1912

Dear Fräulein Felice,

I can't get any writing paper now, at 12:30 at night, because it is next door and my sister is asleep in that room; things in the apartment are rather upside down because our grandson and nephew, owing to the birth of his sister, is staying with us. That's why I am writing on this proof, which also gives you a type sample of my little book.

Now listen, dearest Fräulein, I feel that my words become clearer in the silence of the night. Let us forget about this afternoon's letter, as a letter, and remember it as a warning. But only in the best of good will. I shall never forget the horror of this afternoon after finishing my letter to you, though things were bad enough in the course of writing it. This is what I'm like when I have done no writing of my own (though, needless to say, this was not the only contributing factor). When I live only for myself and for those who are indifferent, familiar, or merely present, who by their indifference, familiarity, or merely by their powerful and lively presence, compensate for my inadequacy, then I am not so much aware of it. But when I want to draw close to someone, and fully commit myself, then my misery is assured. Then I am nothing, and what can I do with nothingness? I must admit that your letter this morning (by the afternoon it had changed) arrived at just the right moment; I was in need of those very words.

But I realize I have not yet recovered: my writing is not lucid enough; even this letter would deserve your reproach. Let us trust in sleep, and in the gods.

How do you like the type sample (needless to say, the paper will be different)? No doubt the typeface is a little too consciously beautiful, and would be more appropriate to the tablets of Moses than to my little prevarications.[41] But now it's being printed that way.

Farewell! I need more kindness than I deserve.

Yours, Franz K.

*Draft of a letter to Felice Bauer, November 9, 1912*[42]

Dearest Fräulein Felice, you are not to write to me again, nor will I write to you. I would be bound to make you unhappy by writing to you, and as for me I am beyond help. To realize this I need not have counted the striking of the clock all through the night; I was well aware of it before writing my first letter to you. If I attempted, nevertheless, to tie myself to you I should deserve to be cursed, were I not cursed already.—If you want me to return your letters, of course I shall do so, much as I should like to keep them. But if you insist on having them, send me a blank postcard as a sign that you do. I on the other hand beg you to keep my letters.—Now quickly forget the ghost that I am, and go on living happily and peacefully as before.

November 11, 1912

Dearest Fräulein Felice,

Thank God! I say so too. If you knew how I spent Friday and Saturday, and in particular the night from Friday to Saturday! Honestly, I didn't fail to count a single stroke of the clock as it struck each quarter-hour. In the afternoon I wrote the last letter but one, in utter and imperative self-torture; then I had to go out and didn't lie down till comparatively late. It is possible—I don't remember exactly—that I went to sleep from sheer misery. In the evening I managed three or four pages of my own writing, which were not too bad; I asked myself in vain where such resources of calmness could still exist within myself from which those words had flown, while I was excluded from tranquility. Later I thought I had become a whole man again and wrote that letter on the proof, but inadvertently it once more turned into something evil, and I stared at it as though I had received it rather than written it. I then lay down and fell asleep surprisingly soon, though only very lightly. But fifteen minutes later I was awake again; half-dreaming, I thought I heard a knock (I have now got to attend to an urgent, horrible, age-old matter that has been hanging over me for a week and I will not allow myself to give you a single thought; you must assist me, then

perhaps as a reward I shall have a free moment and the peace to finish this letter, which is as much a part of me as the beating of my heart and which entirely fills my head, as though I were not sitting in an office which has bought half my days and more, and which makes seemingly justified demands upon me at all times; it's fortunate enough that less important work vanishes from my sleepy eyes—but no more writing now, start working.)

The reward failed to materialize, work drives me this way and that, and so do my thoughts of you, but in different directions. Today I received your last three letters almost at the same time. Your goodness is infinite. I shall now send this letter as it is; I shall probably write several times again today. I will explain in detail why I did not write yesterday. I shall mail this letter as it is, for it makes me unhappy to think that a letter of mine is not at least on its way to you.

So farewell for only a few hours.

Yours, Franz K.

November 11, 1912

Dearest Fräulein Felice,

So I haven't lost you after all. And I was quite convinced I had. The letter in which you described one of my letters as alien to you, horrified me. I saw in it the unintentional, and therefore all the more decisive confirmation of doom, which recently in particular I had thought largely to have escaped, but to which, with a final blow, I had once more to submit. I was beside myself, I didn't know how to write to you; the two Saturday letters were contrived from beginning to end, the only element of truth was my conviction that everything had come to an end.—Can it have a special meaning that now, at this very word, my mother should come into my room crying, dissolved in tears (she is about to go to the shop, she is at the shop all day, has been every day for the last 30 years), that she caresses me, wants to know what's the matter with me, why I don't talk at meals (but I have not talked for a long time, simply to keep a

hold on myself), and a lot more besides. Poor Mother! But I comforted her in a very sensible way, kissed her, and finally made her smile. I even managed to get her, with eyes half-dry, to give me a fairly thorough scolding for going without my afternoon snack (a practice acquired years ago). I know (she doesn't know that I know, or rather that I discovered later) the cause of her extreme anxiety about me. But more of this some other time.

Again there is so much I want to tell you, I don't know where to begin. And yet I think of these last three days as heralds of unhappy, ever-present possibilities, and never again will I write an important letter on a restless working day. You must agree, and not be cross or reproach me. For I am now in the mood, whether you like it or not, to throw myself at your feet, to give myself to you so completely that no trace, no memory of me is left for anyone else; but never again, whether right or wrong, do I wish to hear another remark like the one in that letter. This is not the only reason why I am going to write only short letters from now on (on Sundays, however, I shall always allow myself the luxury of an enormous letter), but also because I want to spend every ounce of myself on my novel, which after all belongs to you as well, or rather it should give you a clearer idea of the good in me than the mere hints in the longest letters of the longest lifetime. The story I am writing, designed, I fear, in such a manner that it will never be completed, is called, to give you an approximate idea, "The Man Who Disappeared," and takes place entirely in the United States of America.[43] So far 5 chapters are completed, the 6th almost. Here are the chapter headings: I. The Stoker; II. The Uncle; III. A Country House Near New York; IV. The March to Rameses; V. In the Hotel Occidental; VI. The Case of Robinson.—I have listed these headings as if they could convey something, which of course is impossible, but I want them to be in your safekeeping until this does become possible. After 15 years of despairing effort (except for rare moments), this is the first major work in which, for the past 6 weeks, I have felt confidence. It must be completed, as I feel sure you will agree, and so, with your blessing, I would like to transfer the brief periods I otherwise spend on writing inaccurate, alarmingly incomplete,

imprudent, dangerous letters to you, to this task around which, until now at any rate, everything, no matter what and from where it came, has calmed down and taken the right turning. Do you agree? And you won't abandon me to the terrible loneliness I feel in spite of all this? Dearest Fräulein Felice, what would I not give to be able to look into your eyes at this moment!

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On Sunday I will answer every question with the utmost intelligence, including the one about not having written yesterday, which is a very long story.

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If one hasn't visited the oculist on account of sore eyes, one must say so explicitly!

For three days now I have denied myself the pleasure of jumping off running trams, for fear that by some kind of telepathy you might then fail to take my warning seriously enough. Now that I have your firm promise at last, I can jump again—which reminds me of something that happened on Saturday. I was out walking with Max and described myself as not exactly the happiest of men. I wasn't paying much attention to where I was going, and a carriage only just missed me. Still deep in thought, I stamped my foot and uttered something inarticulate. At that moment I felt downright furious that I hadn't been run over. Needless to say, the coachman misunderstood and swore at me—quite rightly.

No, I don't live completely withdrawn from my family. Proof of this lies in the enclosed description of the acoustic conditions in our apartment, which has just appeared in a local Prague periodical as a mild public chastisement of my family.[44] Furthermore, my youngest sister (just over 20) is my best friend in Prague, and the other two are both sympathetic and kind. It's only my father and I who hate each other gallantly.

How good it sounds to be addressed by you as *Du*, even if it is only part of a quotation!

Now quickly, before I close: please suggest a remedy to stop me trembling with joy like a lunatic when I receive and read your letters at the office, something that would allow me to do my work

and not get thrown out. It should be possible to read them calmly, don't you think? And then forget them for a few hours. I should be able to achieve this.

Yours, Franz

November 11, 1912

Fräulein Felice!

I am now going to ask you a favor which sounds quite crazy, and which I should regard as such, were I the one to receive the letter. It is also the very greatest test that even the kindest person could be put to. Well, this is it:

Write to me only once a week, so that your letter arrives on Sunday—for I cannot endure your daily letters, I am incapable of enduring them. For instance, I answer one of your letters, then lie in bed in apparent calm, but my heart beats through my entire body and is conscious only of you. I belong to you;[45] there is really no other way of expressing it, and that is not strong enough. But for this very reason I don't want to know what you are wearing; it confuses me so much that I cannot deal with life; and that's why I don't want to know that you are fond of me. If I did, how could I, fool that I am, go on sitting in my office, or here at home, instead of leaping onto a train with my eyes shut and opening them only when I am with you? Oh, there is a sad, sad reason for not doing so. To make it short: My health is only just good enough for myself alone, not good enough for marriage, let alone fatherhood. Yet when I read your letter, I feel I could overlook even what cannot possibly be overlooked.

If only I had your answer now! And how horribly I torment you, and how I compel you, in the stillness of your room, to read this letter, as nasty a letter as has ever lain on your desk! Honestly, it strikes me sometimes that I prey like a spectre on your felicitous name! If only I had mailed Saturday's letter, in which I implored you never to write to me again, and in which I gave a similar promise. Oh God, what prevented me from sending that letter?[46] All

would be well. But is a peaceful solution possible now? Would it help if we wrote to each other only once a week? No, if my suffering could be cured by such means it would not be serious. And already I foresee that I shan't be able to endure even the Sunday letters. And so, to compensate for Saturday's lost opportunity, I ask you with what energy remains to me at the end of this letter: If we value our lives, let us abandon it all.[47]

Did I think of signing myself *Dein*? No, nothing could be more false. No, I am forever fettered to myself, that's what I am, and that's what I must try to live with.

Franz

*The following lines were written on November 13, 1912, but not delivered until Sunday, November 17, by a Berlin florist's messenger, together with a bunch of roses. The following day, the 18th, was Felice's birthday*

Miserable attempt to let innocent roses follow criminal words! But that's how it is: The outside world is too small, too straightforward, too truthful, to hold all that is contained in one man.—Well and good, but in that case a man should keep himself under control, at any rate with a person upon whom he feels himself dependent.—In other words, just where it is utterly impossible?

November 14, 1912

Dearest, dearest! As long as there is so much goodness in the world, one need not fear, need not be anxious. Your letter arrived—I was sitting with my chief discussing the feldspar mining insurance—I clutched the letter, my hands trembling as usual, and stared at my chief as though he were a ghost. But as soon as I had read it two or three times, I felt as calm as I had longed to be for ages, and prayed to be three nights ago. Your [*Dein*] envelope—(but that's wrong, it should be *the* envelope, but the *Du* and *Dein* insist on showing themselves all the time)—*the* envelope with its comforting words can't have been the cause, for I didn't read them until later, and the

contents of the letter should have shaken me, for the more one is given the more frightened one must be on this spinning globe—so it can only have been the *Du* that gripped me, this *Du* for which I thank you on my knees; my anxiety about you forced it out of me, and now you calmly give it back to me. Dearest one! Can I really be sure of you now? The *Sie* glides as though on skates, it may have disappeared in the crack between two letters, one has to chase after it with letters and thoughts morning, noon, and night; but the *Du* stands firm; it stays here like your letter that doesn't move when I kiss it over and over again. But what a word that is! Nothing unites two people so completely, especially if, like you and me, all they have is words.

Today I was the calmest person in the office, as calm as only the most self-disciplined could expect to be, after a week such as this last. I will tell you more about it later. Just think, I even look well; there are always a few people at the office who make it their daily business to scrutinize my appearance. It was they who said so. I did not hurry to answer your letter (which in any case was quite impossible today), but every breath in me answered you and thanked you.

Dearest, dearest! I would repeat this word over and over again for pages were I not afraid that, should someone come into your room while you were studying such uniformly covered sheets, you might not be able to hide what you were reading. I wrote only a few lines yesterday; you won't get them till Sunday. It would be difficult to call them back now, but anyway it is not necessary. I just mention it, so that you are not unnecessarily startled—I have certainly managed to startle you often enough so far!—it's only a few lines, undated, without heading or signature, a pitiful, uncertain attempt at winning you back. Treat them kindly!

But tell me, how do you know that what I have been writing to you on and off just recently was anguish and not madness? It certainly seemed more like the latter, and had I been you I should have tried hard to withdraw. The last letter, for example, wasn't written, it was (forgive the expression) spewed out: I was lying in bed and it occurred to me not as a sequence of sentences, but as one

single terrible sentence which I felt would kill me if I did not write it down. Then, once I had actually started writing, it was no longer so bad; I collected my thoughts, pursued my memories, and here and there a few small consoling untruths crept into the letter. But the ease with which I took it to the station, the haste in which I mailed it, and how I returned home, a profoundly unhappy but still living man—until those dreadful two hours before going to sleep again changed my frame of mind.

Enough of that. I shall get your letters again; write whenever you feel like it, or rather whenever you can; don't stay late at the office on my account, I won't suffer if I don't get a letter, and when I do get one again it will come to life in my hands as no letter (I feel) has ever done before, and in my eyes and to my lips it will amply take the place of all those unwritten letters. You on the other hand will have more time to go for walks on these lovely evenings (yesterday I went for a walk with my youngest sister from 10 to 11:30 at night, we left at 10 and returned at 11:30; you may not be able to imagine her, she is 20 years old, enormously tall and strong, but still childish) if you are not rushing off to rehearsals. I hope your "Humor"[48] comes off successfully! I have been tormenting Max and on several walks have almost dislocated his arm, all because of you, but the silly man can tell me next to nothing about the whole of that telephone conversation, except for your laughter. If you can laugh into the telephone, you must be a very accomplished telephonist. The very thought of the telephone makes me forget laughter. Otherwise, what would prevent me from dashing to the post office to say good evening to you? But sitting there for an hour, waiting to be put through, clutching the seat in anxiety, eventually being summoned and rushing all of a tremble to the telephone, then asking for you in a feeble voice, finally hearing you and perhaps not being capable of answering, thanking God that the three minutes are over and feeling by now an intolerable longing to get home and really talk to you at last—no, I'd rather not. Yet the possibility remains as an attractive thought. What is your telephone number? I am afraid Max has forgotten it.

Well, that's that: now my sleep will be exemplary. Dearest, my dearest, I am entirely unmusical, but does this not cry out for music!

Yours, Franz

November 14, 1912

Dearest, don't let me disturb you, I'm only saying goodnight, and to do so I broke off in the middle of a page of my writing. I'm afraid that soon I shall no longer be able to write to you, for to be able to write to someone (I must give you all kinds of names, so for once you must be called "someone") one has to have an idea of the face one is addressing. I do have a clear idea of your face, that wouldn't be the trouble. But far clearer than that is an image that now comes to me more and more often: of my face resting on your shoulder, of my talking, partly smothered and indistinctly, to your shoulder, your dress, to myself, while you can have no notion of what is being said.

Are you asleep? Or are you still reading—of which I would disapprove? Or are you still at a rehearsal? I most sincerely hope not. By my watch, always slow but never out of order, it is now 7 minutes to 1. Remember, you should sleep more than other people, for I sleep less, though not much less, than most. And I can't think of a better place to store my unused share of universal sleep than in your beloved eyes.

And no wild dreams, please! In my mind I am making a tour around your bed, demanding silence. And after I have put everything in order there, and perhaps even shooed away a drunk from the Immanuelkirchstrasse, I return, more orderly within myself as well, to my writing, or perhaps even straight to sleep.

Never fail, dearest, to tell me roughly what you were doing roughly at the time I am writing to you. I will then check my own guesses against it, and if possible you will make the facts approach my guesses; would it then be so incredible if eventually, after many attempts, they were to coincide and become one great reality of

which we could always be certain?—Just now the tower clock strikes 1 o'clock, Prague time.

Adieu, Felice, adieu! How did you get that name? And don't fly away! This suddenly comes to my mind somehow, perhaps through the word "adieu," which has a certain soaring quality. I think one could derive extraordinary pleasure from soaring to great heights, if this could rid one of a heavy burden which clings to one as I cling to you. Don't be tempted by the beckoning of such relief. Hold on to the delusion that you need me; think yourself more deeply into it. It won't do you any harm, you know, and if one day you want to get rid of me you will always have the strength to do so; but meanwhile you have given me a gift such as I never even dreamt of finding in this life. That's how it is, even if in your sleep you shake your head.

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

November 15, 1912

Look, the "*Du*" is nothing like the help I thought it would be. And today, only the second day, it isn't proving of much use. Surely I could have remained calm, and nothing is easier to understand than that no letter arrived today. But what do I do? I hover around the corridors, stare at every clerk's hands, issue unnecessary orders simply to send someone down especially for the mail (for I am on the 4th floor, the incoming mail is sorted downstairs, our mailmen are unpunctual, in addition we are in the midst of our board elections, the incoming mail is immense, and before your letter is extracted from the silly pile I might have died of impatience upstairs); finally, prompted by my distrust of all and sundry, I myself rush down and, needless to say, find nothing; had something arrived I should have got it in no time, for I have enlisted 3 people to bring your letter up to me before any other mail. For this assignment, these three deserve to be named: the first is the clerk Mergl, humble and obliging; but I feel uncontrollable antipathy toward him because I have observed that once my hopes are

centered mainly on him, your letter arrives only on the rarest of occasions. And when it does, this man's unintentionally cruel face sets my teeth on edge. That in fact is what happened today, I could willingly have thrashed the empty hand. And yet he seems to take a sympathetic interest. I am not ashamed to admit that several times on these blank days I have asked his opinion as to whether the letter might perhaps arrive the next day, and each time, with deep obeisances, he has been convinced it would. Once—I suddenly remember—I was expecting a letter from you with unreasonable certainty, I think it must have been during that bad first month, when this clerk announced to me in the corridor that the mail had indeed turned up and was lying on my desk. But when I hurried to my desk, all that lay there was a postcard from Max from Venice with Bellini's picture representing *The Goddess of Love, Ruler of the Terrestrial Globe.* But what good are generalizations in one's own painful case!—The second messenger is the head of the mailing department, Wottawa, a little old bachelor with a wrinkled face covered in a variety of colored blotches and bristling with stubble, his wet lips constantly munching a cigar; but he is divinely handsome when he stands in the doorway, pulls your letter out of his inside pocket, and hands it to me—a job, needless to say, not actually his. He has an inkling of what it's about, for whenever he has time he invariably tries to forestall the other two and doesn't grumble at having to climb the 4 flights of stairs. On the other hand, I am distressed at the thought that in order to hand the letter over to me personally he sometimes withholds it from another clerk who now and then would deliver it sooner. So there's always some cause for anxiety.—My third hope is Fräulein Böhm. Indeed, handing me the letter makes her positively happy. She comes in beaming and hands me the letter as though it were from a third party, but actually concerns only the two of us, her and me. When one of the other two succeeds in bringing the letter and I tell her about it, she looks as if she were about to cry, and promises to be more watchful the next day. However, the building is very big, we have more than 250 employees, and someone else can easily get the letter first.

Today all three were out of work. I wonder how often I shall repeat it, since it was impossible for a letter to arrive today. Besides, it was only today, on this day of transition, that I felt anxious; if you don't write after tomorrow's letter I shan't worry about it any more. I used to say to myself: "She doesn't write," and that was bad, but now I shall say: "Dearest, so you have gone for a walk," and that can only give me pleasure. By the way, at what time did you get my night letter?

Yours, Franz

November 15, 1912, 11:30 in the evening

Dearest, today I am writing to you before embarking on my own writing, to avoid the sensation of keeping you waiting, to have you not opposite me but by my side, and to be calmer for my own writing, for I must tell you in confidence that these past few days I have written terribly little, indeed practically nothing; I am too preoccupied with you, think too much about you.

Of the two books, which may not arrive in time, one is for your eyes, the other for your heart. The first is rather arbitrarily chosen, good as it is; there are many other books I ought to give you before this one; but it is meant to show that between us even the arbitrary is permissible, because it turns into a necessity. But *Education sentimentale* is a book that for many years has been as dear to me as are only two or three people; whenever and wherever I open it, I am startled and succumb to it completely, and I always feel as though I were the author's spiritual son, albeit a weak and awkward one. Tell me at once whether you read French. You will then get the new French edition too. Tell me that you do read French, even if it isn't true, for this French edition is magnificent.

For your birthday (so it coincides with your mother's, is your life such a direct extension of hers?) I of all people must not wish you anything, for although there probably are things one could urgently wish for you, they would at the same time be directed against me—and so I cannot express them; what I could say would be sheer self-

interest. To make sure that, as needs be, I do not say anything and express no wish, allow me this once, and only in my imagination, to kiss your beloved lips.

Franz

*Max Brod to Felice Bauer*

November 15, 1912

Dear Fräulein Bauer,

Many thanks for your letter. I shall have a word with Franz this afternoon—needless to say, without mentioning your letter. I will then write to you at once unless, as I hope, the situation has meanwhile been cleared up, in which case it would be *superfluous.*—All I ask is that you should make allowances for Franz and his often pathological sensitivity. He responds entirely to the mood of the moment. Altogether he is a man who wants nothing but the absolute, the ultimate in all things. He is never prepared to compromise. For example, when he does not feel fully in possession of all his faculties for work, he is capable of not writing a single line for months on end rather than content himself with work he considers second best. And as with his writing, so with everything else. That is why he often appears moody, eccentric, etc. But from my profound knowledge of his character I know that this is not the case. When it comes to the point he is even very clever and sensible in practical matters. But when it comes to ideals he cannot take things lightly; in such matters he is terribly severe, above all with himself; and since he is physically not very strong and the circumstances of his daily life (the office!!) are not favorable, conflicts arise which one must try and help him to overcome with understanding and kindness, aware that such a unique and wonderful human being deserves to be treated in a different way from the millions of banal and commonplace people.—I am convinced that you will not misunderstand what I say. Please turn to me in any situation of this kind.—Franz suffers greatly from having to be at his office every day until 2 o'clock. In the afternoon he is

exhausted, so all that is left for the “profusion of his visions”[49] is the night. This is tragic. And there he is, writing a novel that puts everything I know in the way of literature in the shade. What might he not achieve if he were free and in good hands!

I ask you earnestly not to tell *anyone* that I have been to Berlin. I have seen no one, spoken only to you.—I hope you are well and that everything will turn out all right.

Sincerely yours, Max Brod

November 15 [16], 1912

Dearest, please don’t torment me! Please! No letter even today, Saturday—today, when I felt sure it would come, as sure as day follows night. But who insisted on a whole letter? Just two lines, a greeting, an envelope, a card! After four letters (this is the fifth) I haven’t had a single word from you. Shame, this isn’t right. How am I to get through these endless days—work, talk, and do whatever else is expected of me? Perhaps nothing has happened, you just haven’t had the time, rehearsals or conferences about the play may have prevented you, but please tell me, who in the world could prevent you from going over to a small table, picking up a pencil, writing “Felice” on a scrap of paper, and sending it to me? It would mean so much to me. A sign of you being alive, a reassurance for me in my attempt at clinging to a living being. A letter will and must come tomorrow, or I won’t know what to do; then all will be well and I’ll stop plaguing you with endless requests for more letters; but if there is a letter tomorrow, then it will have been superfluous to greet you in your office on Monday morning with these complaints; I must express them however because, if you don’t write, no reasoning can dispel the feeling I have that you are turning away from me, talking to others, and have forgotten me. Am I to suffer this in silence? Nor is this the first time I have had to wait for a letter from you (though I’m convinced as always that it isn’t your fault), which this old letter, enclosed, will prove.

Yours

*Enclosure*:
[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

Dear Fräulein Bauer,

I have just returned from the regional government office; walked slowly there and back, it is quite a distance, across the river on to the far bank of the Moldau. I had resigned myself to the fact that there would be no letter from you[50] today, for up to now I have believed that if it doesn't come in the morning it won't come at all. For various reasons I have been a little sad and preoccupied these past two days, and on the way back stopped on Belvederegasse—apartment houses on one side of the street, on the other the exceptionally high wall of Count Waldstein's garden[51]—and without thinking took your letters out of my pocket, put the letter to Max (which lay on top and in which I wasn't particularly interested) underneath, and read a few lines of your first letter. No doubt these movements were partly those of one asleep, for I sleep very little and am aware of it without actually being tired. And then I arrive at the office, and there is your unexpected letter, written on sheets of the magnificent size of your writing paper, and it is of most gratifying weight.

Once more what I am writing is not an answer; let questions and answers entangle themselves to their hearts' content; over and above all that is good in your letter, the best is your permission to let me write to you whenever I like; for I had at last come to the conclusion that it may perhaps be time to cease the daily repetition of writing; I don't know you in this respect, perhaps the daily arrival of a letter embarrasses you; but I, unpunctual as I am throughout my entire being, am bent on writing to you, to you in particular, without opposition. But now I have your permission, I can do as I like; and just as I may write again even without an answer, I am left with the hope that, should I be incapable of writing, I might yet receive a letter out of kindness, since I shall then need it all the more.

Only one answer today. Away with the Pyramidons and all that kind of thing! Go straight to the cause of the headaches rather than to the druggist! It's a pity I cannot examine a longer period of your life so as to understand where the origins of your headaches are hidden. Isn't the sense of artificiality these medicines produce, even at their best, more unbearable to you than the headaches, which are at least a natural affliction? On the whole, healing is only possible from person to person, just as pain can be transmitted only from person to person, as is happening in this case with your headaches and me.

Farewell, and continue to feel well disposed toward me.

Yours, Kafka

*The first letter from Franz Kafka's mother to Felice Bauer*

Prague, November 16, 1912

My dear Fräulein Bauer,

By chance I caught sight of a letter dated Nov. 12, addressed to my son and signed by you. I liked your manner of writing so much that I read the letter to the end before realizing that I was not entitled to do so.

But when I assure you that it was only my son's well-being that impelled me, I feel certain you will forgive me.

Although I have not had the pleasure of meeting you personally, I have enough confidence in you, dear Fräulein Bauer, to confide in you a mother's worries.

What contributes considerably to this confidence is the suggestion in your letter that he should talk to his mother, who surely loves him. Your opinion of me is correct, dear Fräulein Bauer, which is only natural, since any normal mother must love her children, but I have no words to describe the love I feel for my son, and I would gladly give several years of my life if this could ensure his happiness.

Anyone else in his place would be the happiest of mortals, for his parents have never denied him any wish. He studied whatever he

felt like, and since he did not want to be a lawyer he chose the career of an official, which seemed to suit him quite well, as the working hours are short and he has the afternoons to himself.[52]

I have known for many years that he spends his leisure hours writing. But I assumed this to be a mere pastime. Actually, this occupation would not harm his health if only he would sleep and eat like other young people of his age. But he sleeps and eats so little that he is undermining his health, and I am afraid he may not listen to reason until, God forbid, it is too late. I would therefore very much like to ask you if you could somehow draw his attention to this fact, question him about the way he lives, what he eats, how many meals he has, and about his daily routine in general. On the other hand, he must not suspect that I have written to you, nor must he learn that I am aware of his correspondence with you. Should it be within your power to change his mode of life, I would be greatly in your debt and you would be making me very happy.

With the expression of my great esteem, Julie Kafka

If you wish to write to me, please address the letter to: Altstädter Ring, Kinsky Palais 16, Prague.—Personal.

November 17, 1912

Dearest, very dearest! Utterly damnable creature that I am, I now must take the credit for having made you, a healthy person, ill! Take care of yourself, do you hear me, take care of yourself, and for my sake please cure what I have caused! And I have the nerve to reproach you for not writing, and am so wrapped up in my own anxieties and longings that I don't even sense that you are ill, and instead nurse ridiculous suspicions that you are at rehearsals or parties. Honestly, if we were separated by whole continents and you were living somewhere in Asia, we could not be further apart. Every one of your letters, no matter how short, is for me endless (God, everything seemingly turns into a reproach, today's letter is not short, it is exactly 10,000 times longer than I deserve); I read it

down to the signature, then start again, and so it goes around and around in circles. But finally I have to admit that it does have a full stop, that you got up and disappeared, as far as I am concerned, into the dark. It's enough to make one despair of oneself!

But it was high time your letter arrived today. I am not as resolute as you, I wasn't thinking of going to Berlin, I had simply resolved not to get out of bed until your letter arrived, and this resolution needed no particular determination, I was just too unhappy to get up. It also struck me that during last night my novel had definitely deteriorated, and I was at my lowest ebb, yet I still had a most vivid memory of my joy on receiving that registered letter, and whenever I looked up I saw myself—I, who was so wretched—walking on high in utter bliss. The night before last I dreamt about you for the second time. A mailman brought two registered letters from you, that is, he delivered them to me, one in each hand, his arms moving in perfect precision, like the jerking of piston rods in a steam engine. God, they were magic letters! I kept pulling out page after page, but the envelopes never emptied. I was standing halfway up a flight of stairs and (don't hold it against me) had to throw the pages I had read all over the stairs, in order to take more letters out of the envelopes. The whole staircase was littered from top to bottom with the loosely heaped pages I had read, the resilient paper creating a great rustling sound. That was a real wish-dream!

But this morning I had to use very different means to attract the mailman. Our mailmen are so unpunctual. Your letter didn't arrive until 11:15; ten times I sent various people from my bed out onto the landing, as though this could entice him to appear; I didn't dare get up, but finally at 11:15 your letter really was here, ripped open, and read in one breath. I was unhappy about your illness, but now my true nature is revealed: I would have been unhappier still had you been well, and had not written to me. But now we have each other again, and after a firm handshake we must try to make each other healthier, and then continue to live together in good health.—Once again I haven't answered anything, but answers have to be given orally; in writing one doesn't achieve much, at most a foretaste of happiness. Anyway, I shall be writing to you again

today, though I still have to do a lot of running around, not to mention a short story that occurred to me in bed in my misery, and now troubles me and demands to be written.[53]

Yours, Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] (Don't worry, I definitely won't telephone. Don't you either; I couldn't bear it.)

November [17 to] 18, 1912

My dearest, it's 1:30 at night, the story I mentioned is by no means finished, not a line of the novel has been written today, and I go to bed with little enthusiasm. If only the night were free to keep pen to paper and I could write straight through to the morning! That would be a good night. But I must go to bed, for I slept badly last night, hardly at all during the day, and I daren't go to the office in too wretched a state. Tomorrow your letters, dearest, dearest! When I am more or less awake, they undoubtedly give me strength, but when I am half-asleep my one desire is to sink into a chair with them and bare my teeth at anyone who dares to intrude. No, I don't get too worked up about the office; the obvious justification for my irritation is that it has survived five years of office life, of which the first in a private insurance company[54] from 8 A.M. to 7, to 8, and 8:30 P.M. was particularly awful. There was a certain place in a narrow passage leading to my office where almost every morning I used to be overcome with such despair that a stronger, more consistent character than mine might have committed suicide quite cheerfully. Needless to say, things are much better now; I am even treated with undeserved kindness. Especially by my top director.[55] The other day in his office we read together from a book of poems by Heine, while in the anteroom messengers, department heads, and clients—possibly with urgent business—waited impatiently to see him. However, it is bad enough, and considering the energy required, hardly worth the candle.

It has just occurred to me that you might be irritated by this kind of writing paper. I used up all my sister's writing paper a few days ago, and I've hardly ever had any of my own. So I tear page after page from this year's travel diary, and have the nerve to send it to you. But I am trying to make up for it by enclosing a sheet that just dropped out of the diary, containing a song sung in chorus on many a morning in this year's sanatorium, and I fell in love with it and copied it.[56] Actually, it is very well known, and you probably know it too; but do read the words again. And whatever you do, send the sheet back to me, I can't do without it. Despite the emotion, the construction of the poem is so neat, each stanza an exclamation, followed by an inclination of the head. And I swear the poem's sadness is genuine. If only I could keep the tune in my head, but I have no memory for music; at my music lessons my violin teacher, in his despair, used to hold out a stick for me to jump over, and from lesson to lesson my musical progress consisted in his raising the stick higher and higher. That's why the tune I put to this song is very monotonous, really only a sigh. Dearest!

Franz

[A TELEGRAM POSTED IN PRAGUE ON NOVEMBER 18, 1912, 2:30 P.M.]

urgent = rp 10 urgent
felice bauer berlin immanuel kirchstrasse 29
are you ill = kafka + +

November 18, 1912

Dearest, I did deserve that telegram! I am sure you were unavoidably prevented from writing on Saturday, and I had no sort of right to expect a letter today; these unfortunate Sundays are beginning to be a regular misfortune in our relationship—but I was rather put out by the previous long wait, yesterday's letter didn't quite still my hunger, especially because it dealt with your ill

health, and then you had given a definite promise, almost more definite than at any time, that I could expect one or two letters on Monday, and none came; I felt quite muddle-headed at the office; a hundred times I pushed aside a book in which I was supposed to read something (decisions of the Administrative Court, of all things), a hundred times I pulled it back again in vain. An engineer who had come to see me about an exhibition no doubt thought I was mad, for I just stood there, with no thought in my head but that it must be time for the second mail, or rather that the time for it had already passed, and in my absentmindedness I kept staring intently at the engineer's little finger, which was slightly crooked—the one thing I shouldn't have been staring at!—Dearest! I won't go on, it would get worse and worse, and finally become unbearable, even to read. And even telegrams have not proved as successful as I thought. I sent the telegram "urgent" at 2:30 and did not get the reply until 11:15 at night—9 hours later; a trip to Berlin doesn't take that long, and at least there is no doubt that one is getting nearer to Berlin, while for me the hope of a reply kept receding. Then at last the bell! The mailman! Heavens! And what a friendly, happy face he had! That telegram couldn't contain anything unpleasant. Of course not, it was full of kindness and affection, and that's how it looks at me still, lying unfolded before me. Dearest, where does one find the strength and how does one keep one's head when one soars from the depth of misery to the heights of bliss?

I am just sitting down to yesterday's story with an overwhelming desire to pour myself into it, which obviously springs from despair. Beset by many problems, uncertain of you, quite incapable of coping at the office, my novel at a standstill for a day, with a fierce longing to continue the new, equally demanding story, all but total insomnia for the last few days and nights, as well as some minor but nevertheless worrying and irritating things going around in my head —in short, when I went for my evening walk today, reduced by now to half an hour (always of course on the lookout for telegraph boys, actually meeting one, but a long way from our house), I decided quite definitely that my only salvation was to write to a man in Silesia, with whom I had made friends this summer and who for

whole long afternoons had tried to convert me to Christ.[57]—But now your telegram is here and we can leave that letter for a while, you sweet temptation! Now I am of two minds, whether in honor of the telegram I should write my story, or go to bed.—And not one word of apology for all the worries and troubles I caused you with that telegram.

Franz

November 19, 1912

Dearest, this is not a reproach, simply a request for an explanation; I am getting very depressed because I am completely at sea. It is quite right that we should stop this madness of so many letters; yesterday I even started a letter on this subject which I will send tomorrow; but surely we must be in complete agreement about the change in our writing habits; it must be discussed, and announced in advance; otherwise one would go crazy. Well then, how can I explain the fact that, according to your own information, you received or at any rate knew about my last registered letter on Friday morning, but didn't answer it till Saturday; that in Saturday's letter you said you would write again that day, but didn't; that on Monday, instead of getting the two promised letters, I get none; that during the whole of Sunday you wrote not a single word, not until late that night, when you wrote the letter which of course made me happy, insofar as I am still capable of being happy, and you didn't write even on Monday, wouldn't have written at all if I hadn't sent that telegram, since the only letter I received, dated Monday, is the express letter. But the strangest and most frightening thing is this: You are ill for a day and a half, yet attend rehearsals every day of the week; despite your illness, you go dancing on Saturday night, come home at 7 in the morning, stay up till 1 the next night, and on Monday you go to a private dance. For heaven's sake, what sort of life is that! Dearest, explanations please! Forget about the flowers and books. They are simply a sign of my helplessness.

Franz

*On a separate page, enclosed*:
I now see that in your Sunday letter you again promised definitely to write on Monday.

November 20, 1912

Dearest, what have I done that makes you torment me so? No letter again today, neither by the first mail nor the second. You do make me suffer! While one written word from you could make me happy! You've had enough of me; there is no other explanation, it's not surprising after all; what is incomprehensible, though, is that you don't write and tell me so. If I am to go on living at all, I cannot go on vainly waiting for news of you, as I have done these last few interminable days. But I no longer have any hope of hearing from you. I shall have to repeat specifically the farewell you bid me in silence. I should like to throw myself bodily on this letter, so that it cannot be mailed, but it must be mailed. I shall expect no further letters.

Franz

[Probably night of November 20 to 21, 1912]

Dearest, my dearest, it is 1:30 at night. Have I offended you with this morning's letter? How am I to know about the responsibilities you have toward your relatives and friends! You take all that trouble and I trouble you with my reproaches about your troubles. Please, dearest, forgive me! Send me a rose to show that you have forgiven. I am not actually tired, but numb and heavy, and can't find the right words. All I can say is: Stay with me, don't leave me. And should one of my enemies from within write to you as he did this morning, don't believe him, just ignore him and look straight into my heart. Life indeed is so hard and sad, how can one hope to hold anyone with nothing but written words? To hold is what hands are for. But this hand of mine has held your hand, which has become indispensable to my life, for only three moments: when I

entered the room, when you promised me the trip to Palestine, and when I, fool that I am, allowed you to get into the elevator.

May I kiss you then? On this miserable paper? I might as well open the window and kiss the night air.

Dearest, don't be angry with me! That's all I ask of you.

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

[November 21, 1912]

Dearest! You poor child! You have a lamentable and extremely awkward admirer. If he is without a letter from you for two days, he starts hitting out blindly, if only with words, and at the time cannot believe he is hurting you. Afterwards, of course, he is overcome with remorse, and you can rest assured that he is made to suffer for the uneasiness he caused you, down to the slightest twitching of your lips. Dearest, according to today's two letters it seems you are prepared to tolerate me a little longer. Please, please, don't let yesterday's letter change your mind. By the way, I shall probably send a telegram today, to ask forgiveness.

But try to understand my concern for you, my terrible impatience, the torment of the one and only thought in my head, my incapacity to deal with any unrelated matter; life in the office with my eyes permanently on the door; in bed, in my mind's eye the intolerable thoughts, the sleepwalking, and the apathetic stumbling about in the streets; my heart no longer beats but is a tugging muscle, the near collapse of my writing—try to understand all this, and don't be angry. Now I do have the explanation for your not writing, but listen: I didn't get a single letter on Monday, the letter you say I should have had on Monday would have to have been mailed on Saturday evening; that letter at any rate must have been lost; all I got on Sunday was your letter dated Saturday morning; what was in that Saturday evening letter, please tell me, if you still remember, so that at least I can sweeten the memory of that terrible Monday. Well, I had no letter at all on Monday, on Tuesday only the one

dated Sunday, and the express letter I had extorted by force; but again on Wednesday there was no letter. That was more than I could bear, so yesterday's letter was written in order to rid myself of some of the feelings that were tearing at me. Just think, for me there was really no explanation other than that, owing to some curse that is upon me, you wanted to end it all of your own free will, or that—and it would come to the same—your mother had forbidden you to write; this mother who in your first letters—I remember it well—appeared in such a favorable light, waving to you from the balcony, complaining of your meager breakfast, telephoning to ask you to come home when you stayed too late at the office, has gradually become a more somber figure: demanding needlework for a birthday present, not fully appreciating your office work, forcing you to pay calls, in your opinion unnecessary ones, frightening you "to death" by coming into your room at night when you are in bed writing, and a number of other things. And so I stuck grimly to these two possible explanations; I couldn't get away from them, and so wrote that letter. Now I see it was obviously due to the holiday[58] in Berlin (which I might have found in my calendar merely by looking) that Tuesday's letter did not arrive here till today, Thursday. Have all these wrongs been put right once again by your kindness, and may I obliterate these days, and all despair, with one kiss?

But it seems to me that one of my letters must have been lost. According to my rough calculation, I have written at least 14 or 15 letters since Friday [November 8], and you say you had only one letter on Tuesday? To check on this, tell me whether you received the letters which had enclosures, and which I therefore remember distinctly. In one of them I enclosed an old letter that had never been mailed, with the comic mode of address dating from time immemorial: "Dear Fräulein Bauer"; another contained a printed page with a description of the noises in this apartment.[59]

Yes, of course I have read the Strindberg quotations, and can't understand how I could have failed to write to you about them. They are terrifying truths, and it is admirable to have stated them so frankly, but there are times when one fears that even more

terrifying truths are stirring within one. There is profound truth in this: When one loves, one acquires a new self-protection, avoids certain trains of thought, refuses to hear certain words, while certain things, which hitherto one had absorbed absentmindedly, one now finds irritating. It is almost impossible to introduce a lighter diet; wine is replaced by fruit juices, if one drinks at all, which one rarely does.

I eat three times a day, nothing between meals, literally nothing. In the morning stewed fruit, biscuits, and milk. At 2:30, out of filial affection, the same as the others, but on the whole rather less, less meat in particular, even less than a little, and more vegetables. Winter evenings at 9:30: yogurt, pumpernickel, butter, all kinds of nuts, chestnuts, dates, figs, grapes, almonds, raisins, pumpkins, bananas, apples, pears, oranges. Needless to say, only a selection of all these are eaten, not all mixed up as though poured from a horn of plenty. No food is more stimulating to me than this. Please don't insist on 3 extra mouthfuls, everything is eaten for your benefit, and these three mouthfuls would be to my detriment.

Don't worry about your letters, they are the only things in perfect order, and locked up, within the gigantic disorder of my desk, and each time I take them out—not a rare occurrence—they are put back again in perfect order.—Oh God, I have still so many things to tell you, so many questions to answer, and I have come to the end, and besides, it's now 3 o'clock.[60] Well, more tomorrow. Yes, if you mail your letter on Saturday morning, I shall have it on Sunday, and then my Sunday will be rather better than usual.

Franz

[IN THE TOP MARGIN] I'd better not send a telegram after all. It might give you an unnecessary fright. In the 4 letters you should have had today, the good and the bad should cancel each other out.—Did you appear as "Humor"? Is there a picture of it? About my picture, tomorrow.

November 21, 1912

My dearest, I now have your telegram and realize the damage I have done. Coming from the office I sent you an enormous express letter, but in my absentmindedness forgot to register it. In view of your telegram, I am now afraid that the express letter, to complete my misfortune, may not arrive, for we seem to be persecuted by the post office, and the girl who took my letter was rather careless and inefficient. That's why I am in a hurry to send this registered letter, since I'm not allowed to send a telegram. I hope they will both arrive, and you will accept them with forgiveness and warmth. Terrible to think that our correspondence progresses amid such catastrophes. There is hardship enough in our separation, why these additional blows? According to your telegram, you wrote on Monday as well, in which case you must be referring to a Monday letter other than the express letter I had already acknowledged. If so, then not only your second Saturday letter but also your first Monday letter must have been lost. This really would be disastrous. One can make inquiries about lost letters, and this I could have done with regard to that earlier lost letter, but not without an official statement from you, which I didn't want to bother you with, so I let it go at the time, and expect one may as well let it go this time. The time you would spend being questioned by some post office official could be better spent sending me a new little greeting, for the old letter would remain lost, despite all investigations.

What makes it worse is that not only was I completely shattered by it all, and am only slowly recovering, thanks to today's wonderful letter, but I was inconsiderate enough to do my best to draw you into this suffering.

You will write again, won't you?

Franz

November 21, 1912

Dearest, it's lucky I didn't write to you two hours ago, or I would have said things about my mother for which you would have hated

me. I am calmer now, and can write with greater confidence. I still don't feel too good inside, but that will improve, if not of its own accord, then for love of you. It was entirely my fault—unforgivable and criminal—that my mother managed to read one of your letters. I have told you before that I am in the habit of carrying your letters on me; they give me continuous support; I go about my business a better, more competent man. Needless to say, I no longer carry all your letters around with me, as in those miserable early days, but at least one or two of the most recent ones. That was the cause of the disaster. On arriving home, I usually change my coat and hang the one I've been wearing on a hanger in my room. My mother walked through my room when I wasn't there (my room is a passage, or rather a thoroughfare between the living room and my parents' bedroom), saw the corner of the letter sticking out of the inside pocket, and, with the inquisitiveness that is part of love, pulled it out, read it, and wrote to you. Her love for me is as great as her lack of understanding of me, and her inconsiderateness, due to this lack of understanding, becomes part of her love, and is greater still, and to me, at times, altogether incomprehensible.

I am going to deal with all of today's letters as one. Your advice about food and sleep didn't disconcert me as much as it should, considering I had already told you how glad I am to have found my present way of life as the only moderately satisfactory solution to the contradictions I have to live with. But today, when Max dropped a delicate hint about the keeping of letters and about his things never being safe from his parents (I know from experience his father's searching and prying into every corner), his remarks coincided with all you say on the subject in today's letters (for today as always your letters were as present to me as is the expression on the face of someone I am talking to), and I soon discovered perhaps not everything, but enough to force Max to tell me everything.[61]

I can't ask you to forgive me; how could even you, kindest of creatures, forgive this? I shall have to bear this guilt, and carry it around with me. Everything had been so good; I was looking forward to enjoying in peace the happiness you give me; your remark about the Christmas holidays filled me with infinite hope,

which in this morning's letter from my sordid office I dared not even mention—when along comes my mother and wrecks it all. I have always looked upon my parents as persecutors; until about a year ago I was indifferent to them and perhaps to the world at large, as some kind of lifeless thing, but I see now it was only suppressed fear, worry, and unhappiness. All parents want to do is drag one down to them, back to the old days from which one longs to free oneself and escape; they do it out of love, of course, and that's what makes it so horrible. I must stop, the end of the page comes as a warning that it might get too wild.

Yours, yours, yours.

*On a separate page, enclosed*:

November 21, 1912

I am enclosing a snapshot of myself when I was perhaps 5 years old; at the time the angry expression was put on as a joke, now I suspect it was secretly meant. But you must send it back, it is owned by my parents, who own everything, and want to be part of everything. (Today of all days I had to write about your mother!) When you've sent it back, I'll send you others, including a recent bad and silly one, which you may keep if you like. I can't have been five years old in this photograph, more likely two; but as a lover of children you will be the better judge. When children are around I prefer to close my eyes.

Franz

This would be the most inappropriate moment to ask you to give or lend me a photograph of yourself. I just mention it.

November 22, 1912

Dearest, I haven't time to apologize for the distress I caused you on Thursday, which shows so clearly in your letter of today that even a

deluded fool would be moved to pity. But not I, I just go on sinning, and whatever I do turns to hostility toward you, while another part of my being wants to throw itself at your feet, as though I had always existed for you alone. Not enough that I leave your letter in my pocket, that my mother reads it, and writes to you. That would have been a guilt I could, in time, have come to terms with. But a guilty man burrows deeper and deeper into his guilt. When I saw Max yesterday, it all seemed bad, but not intolerable; I promised him, I may even have sworn, that I wouldn't breathe a word to my mother. And even if I hadn't sworn, it would have been the obvious thing to do, out of consideration for you. But how can I find the composure for consideration, even for that which I hold most dear? As soon as I left Max to go for a little walk, I began to boil inside, I was fuming with rage, and when I came home I was convinced that if I didn't have it out with my mother, I would never be able to speak to her again. We had visitors—my future brother-in-law[62] and one of his friends. I went straight to my room, well aware that I would not be able to stand it there; I was amazed that the apartment didn't disintegrate, such was the tension within me. With some kind of premonition my mother had started shuffling about in the hall. And so we inevitably met, and I told her what I thought, told it to her in an utterly uncontrolled outburst. I am convinced it was good for us both, for my mother as well as for me, and I can't remember ever in my life having spoken to her as freely as I did afterwards. I have never found in any family, whether of friends or relations, as much coldness and false friendliness as I have always felt obliged to show toward my parents (through my fault as well as theirs). In spite of her worries, I can see how pleased my mother is with our present relationship, after the unpleasantness of last night. Here as everywhere for me, you were a guardian angel. But that's not really the point. For your sake I should have said nothing to my mother, yet I did. Dearest, can you forgive this, too? Soon I shall have accumulated so much guilt toward you that even human judges will know how much I am in your debt; as for the Judges on High, they have known it for a long time.

Do I still have the right to accept the kiss of reconciliation you offer at the end of your letter, especially since it would be a kiss that would prevent both your letter and mine from ever ending?

Franz

*Max Brod to Felice Bauer*

Prague, Post Office Department, November 22, 1912

My dear Fräulein Bauer,

It seems that in some way your letter had prepared Franz, for when I gave him a hint he guessed at once and I could not deny that his mother had read your letter, etc.—In any case, this whole matter has turned out well and he will be more careful from now on.

As for that letter, there is not much I need say: Franz's mother loves him very much, but she has not the faintest idea who her son is and *what his needs are.* Literature is a "pastime"! My God! As though it did not eat our hearts out, willing victims though we are. —Frau Kafka and I have often had words over this. All the love in the world is useless when there is total lack of understanding. That letter proves this yet again.—After years of trial and error Franz has at last found the only diet that suits him, the vegetarian one. For years he suffered from his stomach; now he is as healthy and as fit as I have ever known him. Then along come his parents, of course, and in the name of love try to force him back into eating meat and being ill.—It is just the same with his sleeping habits. At last he has found what suits him best, he can sleep, can do his duty in that senseless office, and get on with his literary work. But then his parents … This really makes me bitter.—Franz, thank God, is gratifyingly stubborn and sticks precisely to what is good for him. His parents just will not see that an *exceptional man* like Franz needs *exceptional conditions* to prevent his sensitive spirit from withering. The other day I had to write an 8-page letter to Frau Kafka about this. His parents wanted Franz to work in the factory[63] in the afternoons; whereupon Franz firmly *resolved to commit suicide* and went so far as to send me a farewell letter. Only by ruthless

intervention did I succeed at the last moment in protecting him from his “loving” parents.

If his parents love him so much, why don’t they give him 30,000 gulden as they would to a daughter, so that he could leave the office, go off to some cheap little place on the Riviera to create those works that God, using Franz’s brain, wishes the world to have. —So long as Franz is not in a position to do this, he will never be entirely happy. His whole disposition cries out for a peaceful, trouble-free existence dedicated to writing. In the present circumstances his life is a kind of vegetating, with a few bright moments.—You will now more readily understand his nervousness.

A fine book of Kafka’s is about to appear. Perhaps he will be lucky with it and can start a life devoted entirely to writing. He is also writing a long novel, has reached chapter 7, and I think it promises to be a great success.

I don’t like talking about *Nornepygge*; of all my work this is the one book from which I feel completely estranged. Thank you for your kind interest.

With kind regards, yours sincerely, Max Brod

November 23, 1912

Dearest, oh God, how I love you! It is very late at night; I have put aside my little story, on which I really haven’t worked at all these last two evenings, and which is quietly developing into a much bigger story. How could I give it to you to read, even if it were finished? It is rather illegible, and even if that weren’t an obstacle—up to now I certainly haven’t spoiled you with beautiful writing—I don’t want to send you anything to read. I want to read it to you. Yes, that would be lovely, to read this story to you, while I would have to hold your hand, for the story is a little frightening. It is called *Metamorphosis*, and it would thoroughly scare you, you might not want to hear a word of it, for alas! I scare you enough every day with my letters. Dearest, on this better writing paper let us start a better life. While writing that last sentence, I caught myself looking

heavenward, as though you were up there. If only you weren't, which indeed you are, but down here with me in the depths. And don't deceive yourself, they are great depths, the more calmly we write to each other from now on—may God grant us that at last—the more clearly you will see it. If only you will stay with me, in spite of it! Well, perhaps serenity and strength are destined to be where restlessness and weakness need them.

I am too depressed at the moment, and perhaps I shouldn't be writing at all. But my story's hero has also had a very bad time today, and yet it is only the last lap of his misfortune, which is now becoming permanent. So how can I be particularly cheerful! But if this letter serves as an example to you never to tear up a single scrap you have written to me, then it is, after all, a worthwhile and important letter. But you mustn't think I am always so sad. I'm not. With one exception, I have no reason to complain too much; and everything, with the exception of this one hopelessly black spot, could still turn out well, be pleasant and, with your help, wonderful. On Sunday, if I have the time and ability, I want to pour it all out to you, and with your hands in your lap you can watch the great flood. But now, dearest, I'm off to bed. May you be given a pleasant Sunday, and I some of your thoughts.

Franz

November 24, 1912

[Begun during the night of November 23 to 24]

Dearest, once again I am putting aside this exceptionally repulsive story in order to refresh myself by thinking of you. By now it is more than half finished, and on the whole I am not too dissatisfied; but it is infinitely repulsive, and these things, you see, spring from the same heart in which you dwell and which you tolerate as a dwelling place. But don't be unhappy about it, for who knows, the more I write and the more I liberate myself, the cleaner and the worthier of you I may become, but no doubt there is a great deal

more to be got rid of, and the nights can never be long enough for this business which, incidentally, is highly voluptuous.

Now, before I go to sleep (it is actually 3 A.M., usually I only work till 1; you must have misunderstood one of my last letters, I meant 3 in the afternoon; I stayed on in the office and wrote from there), because it is your wish and because it is so simple, I will whisper in your ear how much I love you. I love you so much, Felice, that if I can keep you I should want to live forever, but only, it must be remembered, as a healthy person and your equal. Well, that's how it is, and you should know it, and indeed it is almost beyond kissing, the awareness of which leaves me with almost nothing to do but stroke your hand. And this is why I would rather call you Felice than dearest, and rather *Du* than darling. But since I want to relate as many things as I can to you, I also like calling you dearest, and am happy to be able to call you anything.

Sunday [November 24, 1912], after lunch

Two letters! Two letters! No Sunday could live up to such a start! But now, dearest, since you have not only forgiven me but also see my point, we should, shouldn't we, Felice, whatever happens, remain calm and love each other without further trouble. I wish I were strong enough to make you lively and gay again with my letters, as, alas, I was weak enough to make you tired and tearful. I almost think I could. But if I succeed, it will be due entirely to the fortifying knowledge of having you as a friend, and being able to rely on someone like you.

But dearest, please, please don't ever again write at night; I read these letters that cost you your sleep with a mixture of joy and sorrow. Don't do it again; sleep peacefully, as you deserve; I couldn't work properly if I knew you were still awake—above all on my account. But knowing you are asleep, I work with greater courage, for then I imagine that you have completely surrendered to my care, helpless in your healthy sleep, and in need of help, and that I am working for you and for your good. With these thoughts,

how could my work fail to progress! So sleep, sleep, think how much more work you do in the daytime than I. Go to sleep tomorrow without fail, write no more letters in bed; if my wish is powerful enough, you won't even do it today. Then, before going to bed, you may throw your supply of aspirin tablets out of the window. Well, no more late writing, leave writing at night to me, give me this faint chance to be proud of my nightwork, it is the only pride I feel vis-à-vis you; without it I should be too submissive, and surely you would not like that either. But wait a moment, to prove that nightwork everywhere, even in China, is left to men, I'll go to the bookshelf (it's in the next room) to get a book and copy out for you a short Chinese poem. Well, here it is (what a noise my father is making with his nephew!): It is by the poet Yüan Tzu-tsai (1716–97), on whom I find the comment: "Very talented and precocious, had a brilliant career in the civil service. He was uncommonly versatile both as man and artist." To understand the poem one should know that well-to-do Chinese sprinkle their sleeping quarters with fragrant essences before going to sleep. The poem may be very slightly improper, but its lack of propriety is amply compensated for by its beauty. Here it is at last:

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

ı the cold night, while poring over my book,
forgot the hour of bedtime.
he scent of my gold-embroidered bedcover
as already evaporated,
he fire in the hearth burns no more.
ly beautiful mistress, who hitherto has controlled
er wrath with difficulty, snatches away the lamp,
nd asks: Do you know how late it is?[64]

Well? This is a poem one has to savor to the full. It reminds me, incidentally, of three things, but I won't try to examine the

associations.

First of all, I am delighted that you are a vegetarian at heart. I don't like strict vegetarians all that much, because I too am almost a vegetarian, and see nothing particularly likable about it, just something natural, and those who are good vegetarians in their hearts, but, for reasons of health, from indifference, or simply because they underrate food as such, eat meat or whatever happens to be on the table, casually, with their left hand, so to speak, these are the ones I like. It's a pity that my love for you advanced so fast, that there is no room left to love you more for what you eat. And you share my craze for sleeping with the window open? Open the whole year around? Even in winter? Wide open? That would be going one better than me, for in the winter I open it only a little, one tiny crack. True, I look out onto a large empty lot, beyond which flows the Moldau.[65] And on rising ground immediately beyond the river are public gardens. So we get a lot of air and wind and cold, and though you may still leave your window wide open in the Immanuel-Kirchstrasse, it's by no means certain that you would do so in a room situated like mine. Besides, I beat you in this: my room has no heating whatever, yet here is where I do my writing. I've just noticed (I am sitting by the window) that the inside window is wide open, the outside one barely closed, while the balustrade on the bridge down below is covered, not in snow, but white frost. Now you try and compete with that!

The poem by your little ladies is splendid.[66] I am of course returning it, but I have made a copy. But to punish your Fräulein Brühl for wishing you a husband with a "von" to his name, or rather wishing you for him, I would like her to have the following birthday present: as from tonight, night after night, after office hours, for one whole year until her next birthday, two mad managers will come up to her and, one on either side of her, will dictate letters unceasingly and simultaneously until midnight. And only because she writes such pretty verse would I be prepared, should you intercede on her behalf, to reduce her sentence to six months. But because you like her, and because she amuses herself so prettily, I shall send her a picture postcard from Kratzau (that's up in the mountains behind

Reichenberg) where unfortunately I have to go tomorrow, and on it, in an unknown hand and without a signature, I will get someone to write: “Congratulations. But ah! Who from?”

I’ve been meaning to ask you for a long time, and always it slips my mind, how it is that you take, let alone read, so many and such diverse publications which you mentioned in your second letter as being among your daily mail? You mentioned so many, and still add “etc.” If that is so—i.e., if I understood right, then we could start an additional exchange between us. I can’t lay my hands on too many things that you have held in your hands, and I can’t send you too many things that concern me. For a long time now I have planned, and only my indolence has prevented me repeatedly from carrying it through, to cut out and collect from various papers news items that astonished me for some reason, that affected me, that seemed important to me personally for a long time to come; at a glance, they were usually quite insignificant, for instance just recently “The beatification of 22 Christian Negro youths in Uganda”—(which I have just come across and am enclosing).[67] I find something of the kind in the papers nearly every other day. News which seems to be meant only for me, but I haven’t got the patience to start the collection for myself, let alone keep it up. But I should do it with pleasure for you, and you, if it would amuse you, could do it for me. I am sure everyone feels there are certain news items not meant for every reader, but aimed only at certain readers here and there, in which the outsider could detect no reason for special interest, and such bits of news that specially affect you I should value more than any collection of mine, which I would send you without much regret. But don’t misunderstand me: I mean only small clippings from daily papers, chiefly about actual happenings; clippings from magazines should be rare exceptions; don’t think I want you to cut your beautiful periodicals to pieces for me. Besides, I read only the *Prager Tagblatt*, and that only very fleetingly, and of magazines only the *Neue Rundschau*,[68] and also *Palästina*, which they have stopped sending me, though I am still a subscriber. (They probably think they did more for me with that one copy the night we met than they do for other subscribers in the course of a whole year—and they are

right.) To start the collection with a fitting contribution, I am enclosing the report of a nasty trial.[69]

Now that I mentioned my trip to Kratzau, I can't get the tiresome thought out of my head. My little story would certainly have been finished tomorrow, but now I have to leave at 6 tomorrow evening; I get to Reichenberg at 10, and go on to Kratzau at 7 the next morning to appear in court. I have the firm intention of making such a complete fool of myself in this rather complicated and risky case that no one will ever send me off on that kind of job again. Anyway, I am hoping to be back in Prague by 4 o'clock on Tuesday afternoon, and will go straight to the office, just in case (but I won't be at all anxious, not in the least bit anxious) there is a letter from you, and then, content if there is one, composed if there isn't, I shall go home and straight to bed. If this plan is to succeed, I shall have to finish my business in court at Kratzau in less than 3 hours; so I am seriously thinking of gradually fainting away toward the end of the 3rd hour and being hurriedly carried off to the station. In lieu of my signature, the court proceedings will say: "The representative of the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute (not Company, dearest!) fainted, and had to be removed." Just think how doubly revived I shall be on the train, and how I shall race to Prague!

Oh dear, there is still so much to say, and so many questions to ask, but it is so late, and I can't go on. As usual on Sunday, I went this morning to see Baum (do you know Oskar Baum?[70]) and read to them (Max was there too, with his fiancée) the first part of my little story.[71] Later a girl arrived, who in some way reminded me slightly of you (it doesn't take much for me to be reminded of you). I was spellbound, and after my eyes had exhausted the slight resemblance I wanted to go to the window, look out, see no one, and be wholly yours.

I am on very good terms with my mother. We are even developing a satisfactory relationship; our common blood is beginning to make sense, she seems to love you. She has even written you a letter, but I wouldn't let her mail it, it was too meek; it was the kind of letter I should have demanded on that bad evening, and that wouldn't have been right. Soon, I think, she will write you a calm, friendly letter.

So I am not to have a picture of you? And no one took a photograph of “Humor”? Strange people, to miss such an opportunity. Are there no group photos of employees? Views of the offices? The factory? The Immanuel-Kirchstrasse? No factory brochure? The address of your Prague branch? What does your job entail? I am interested in every little detail of your office (in contrast to mine). What attractive slogans you use! You are in the record office? What exactly is that? How can you dictate to two girls simultaneously? If you send me something attractive from your office, I will send you my Institute’s annual reports with some extremely interesting articles by me.[72]

And now I embrace you in farewell.

Franz

November 24, 1912

With extreme cunning—and to distinguish myself by my cunning in the eyes of the beloved—I am sending each page of this Sunday letter (there are five) in a separate envelope on the assumption that the post office, though it seems to plague us, won’t lose them all (even though it’s Sunday, and they can’t be registered). On the other hand, this method increases the risk of one page or another getting lost; well, I’m doing my best and will not invite danger by mentioning further fears.

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On Wednesday, dearest, you probably won’t get a letter, more likely a picture postcard, but preferably to your apartment, so as not to attract your little lady’s attention.

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Please write and tell me exactly how well you are. These headaches! These tears! This nervousness! Dearest, I beg of you, sleep properly, go for walks, and if when reading my letter you sense something unpleasant approaching, something I should have left unsaid, tear it up at once, don’t hesitate! But remain calm, calm. One letter is of no consequence, I’ll write ten for the one, and should you tear up 10, I will replace them with 100.

Yours, Franz

Wouldn't it be better for you to spend the summer in a sanatorium? Before long I will send you a very tempting description.

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Did you ever bother to find out whether the Jews are playing in Berlin?[73] I think they must be. Unfortunately I haven't answered Löwy's letter yet; what I told you in my first letter, namely, that I am an erratic letter writer, still holds good today.

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The yearbook [*Arkadia*] won't be out before February. My own little book [*Meditation*] will appear either next month or in January. Needless to say, you will get them both as soon as they are published. I deliberately didn't write anything in the Flaubert [*Education sentimentale*]; it is a book that should not have other people's writing in it. Besides, I am not at all sure that I am capable of saying anything to you that could be seen by the world at large.

Yours

Sunday night, November 25, 1912

[Night of Sunday, November 24, to Monday, November 25, 1912]

Well today, dearest, I shall have to put aside my story, I have worked on it today nowhere near as much as yesterday, and on account of that maddening trip to Kratzau I will have to let it wait for a day or two. This grieves me, but I hope the story won't suffer too much, though I shall need another 3–4 evenings to finish it. By "won't suffer too much," I mean that my story, alas, has already been harmed enough through my method of working. This kind of story should be written with no more than one interruption, in two 10-hour sessions; then it would have its natural spontaneous flow, as it had in my head last Sunday. But I haven't got twice 10 hours at my disposal. So one has to try to do the best one can, since the very

best has been denied to one. What a pity I can't read it to you—a great pity. Every Sunday morning, for instance. Not in the afternoon, I wouldn't have time, I would be writing to you. Today I actually wrote until 6:15 P.M., then went to bed, though I should have mailed the letters first, but was afraid I should get to bed too late, and would then be unable to sleep, for as soon as they get together next door and start playing cards (perhaps the only thing in which I couldn't force myself to participate, even for my father's sake, except on the rarest occasions), there is no more peace for me. But tonight I needn't have worried; I had not realized that my parents and my youngest sister were spending the evening with my married sister, while the middle one went to the country with her fiancé to see her future in-laws. Nevertheless I slept badly, obviously a punishment for not having mailed the letters; since I was alone in the apartment, except for the maid—she is 17 but quiet as a mouse—no one woke me; there I was, dozing, and since my room is as cold as the grave, I couldn't even make the effort to reach for my watch. When I finally did, I saw to my horror that it was 9:30. For heaven's sake, will it be too late to mail the letters? Frantic exercises for 2 minutes—described, perhaps, once before—with windows wide open, getting dressed, and off to the station. Outside the house—in our somewhat deserted neighborhood doors are now locked at 9—I just managed to avoid my family, who were on their way home; I quickly took a side turning, and fled to the station. I've got a new pair of shoes, and stump something terrible along the empty streets. I hope at least that the letters arrive in good time. I return immediately and have my supper as usual, my youngest sister keeps me company, cracks nuts, eats more herself than she gives to me, and we usually enjoy ourselves very much. That's supper, but then there are times when even my favorite sister is not enough, and when I am not enough for her.

Franz

Shortly before leaving, November 24 [25], 1912

Dearest, how upset one gets when there is something to worry about. There were days when I waited calmly for your letters, picked them up calmly, read them once, put them in my pocket, read them again, put them away again, but all in perfect calm. There are other days, and today is one of them, when I tremble with intolerable excitement waiting for your letter, when I pick it up like some living thing and cannot bear to let it go.

Dearest, have you noticed how astonishingly of one mind we are in our letters? If there is a question in one, the following morning brings the answer. The other day, for instance, when you wanted me to say I love you, I had felt compelled to put the answer in the letter that crossed yours that night somewhere between here and Berlin; but perhaps it was obvious anyway from the opening words of my very first letter, or even from the first casual look I gave you that evening. There have been so many examples of our mutual understanding that I have lost count. But the best came today.

As I told you yesterday, I am going away this evening, alone, at night, into the mountains, and though you couldn't have known, you send me this charming little companion. What a delightful little girl! The narrow shoulders! So fragile and easy to hold! She is so modest, but calm. No one had worried her in those days, and made her cry, and her heart beats the way it should. Looked at for any length of time, you know, the picture could easily bring tears to one's eyes. You want me to return it some time? All right, I will. But meanwhile, hidden in my confounded inside pocket, it will take a brief, uncomfortable trip in trains and through various hotel rooms, though the girl professes, so far without explanation, to feel uneasy in hotel rooms. Yes, one can see the little watch chain, the brooch is pretty, the hair waved and almost too carefully arranged. But in spite of all that, you are easily recognizable; there was a moment I remember above all others, when you sat at the table with an expression not unlike the one in the picture. You were holding one of the Thalia photographs; you looked at me, who made some stupid remark, and let your eyes wander around the table in a quarter-circle, until they came to rest on Otto Brod, who then gave the correct explanation of the photograph. The changing view of your

face, as you slowly turned your head, left an indelible impression on me. And now the little girl for whom, needless to say, I am an utter stranger, arrives and confirms the truth of this delightful memory.

I have thought of another example of our oneness of mind. Yesterday I asked you for printed matter, today you promise to send it. But these palpitations, dearest! How can it be true that I am part of your heart if it palpitates while I want it to be calm?

Yours, Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Kratzau, November 26, 1912]

Best wishes! A beastly journey, but a pleasant traveling companion.

F. Kafka

Kratzau, District Court, November 26, 1912

Dearest, while behind me the greedy opposing lawyers are fighting for the highest bid (it doesn't matter if you don't know what this means[74]), I am quite content to sit at this little table and send you, dearest, my very best love.

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Kratzau, November 26, 1912]

And so my little trip goes merrily along. Best wishes.

F. Kafka

November 26, 1912

Felice, I announce that this is one of those letters I wrote about recently, that should be torn up when you reach the second or third sentence. Now is the moment, Felice, tear it up; it is also my

moment for not writing it, but alas, you will read it, as surely as I shall write it.

I have just come back from my trip; I went first to the office, of course, and there found your very nice letter of Sunday night. I read it in the porter's lodge, and his tiny wife looked up at me while I was reading. Your letter is nice and kind and true. (The only thing wrong is my age on the photograph; I was exactly a year old, as I have just discovered.) You strive to let me be part of you. Oh God, what I want is every moment of the whole of your life. Nevertheless, you do all that is humanly possible, and I should have to love you for your kindness alone, if I didn't love you for your whole precious being. Why then was I not satisfied with your letter? Why did I search the porter's table for another? You did say you would write on Monday, but your Monday letter wasn't there. But haven't you promised many times to be true to me? Didn't I write only the other day that I will remain calm, even if there is no letter at all at the office? And after all, there was your Sunday letter, and didn't you go to a rehearsal on Monday evening, so that your letter may have been mailed a little too late? At any rate, there was no cause for anxiety in the absence of your Monday letter as such. Then why was I alarmed when I hurried home, convinced that I should find your Monday letter there, and at the same time in hopeless despair at the certainty of my coming disappointment? Why, dearest? Doesn't it seem like a lack of love on my part? Though if at this moment my worries about your health mingle with my anxiety, I still worry a great deal more about your love. Again and again these lamentable expressions creep in: That you should tolerate me a little longer, that I should receive a few of your thoughts, etc., and when there is no letter, then a telegram seems a very slow way of asking why. So far I have only once been as horrified as you were, when you detected an unfamiliar note in one of my letters, but there are some little remarks that do frighten me. I am frightened when I read that your mother wants to protect you against disappointments, when I read about your friend from Breslau, about whom I haven't dared ask for weeks; I am frightened when you tell me that you love me, and if you didn't tell me, I should die. By the way, you once wrote

something of the kind; I couldn't understand how you could have reached this true conclusion. But I was not surprised that you were aware of it, because your feelings are never mistaken, that I know.

Well, for all these contradictions there is a plain and simple explanation; I repeat it, because it is so easily forgotten, even by me: it is the state of my health, no more and no less. I can't tell you more about it, but that is what robs me of my confidence vis-à-vis you, which upsets me, and eventually drags you down. That above all, and not because I love you, is why I need your letters and all but devour them; that is why I am unable to believe all the nice things you say; that is why I cringe before you with these sad requests—for that and no other reason. And faced with that, of course, even the kindest person's power is bound to fail. I feel I shall never have the strength to do without you, but what I considered a virtue in others, turns out to be my greatest vice.——

It was a beastly journey, dearest. The lost evening made me very melancholy. Indeed, there wasn't a single moment on the trip when I didn't feel at least a tiny bit unhappy. Everything was damp, even up in the mountains, though some snow fell during the night; the heating in my hotel room couldn't be turned off, and I slept all night with the window wide open, the snow blowing into my face while I slept. From the beginning of the trip I sat opposite a repulsive woman and felt restless because I had to keep curbing my desire to ram my fist into her mouth every time she yawned. During the whole trip your photograph was looked at now and then for comfort, and for comfort your photograph spent the night on a chair beside my bed. One shouldn't ever go away; better to be insubordinate at the office, if at home there is work to be done that requires all one's energy. This everlasting fear (it hasn't left me yet) that the trip may have harmed my story, that I shan't be able to write any more, etc. And to have to face this miserable weather with such thoughts in one's head, to have to plough through the mud, get stuck in the mud, get up at 5 o'clock! To take my revenge on Kratzau, I went to the stationer and bought the only decent book Kratzau possessed at that moment. A story by Balzac. By the way, the introduction says that Balzac followed for years a certain routine

which seems very sensible to me. He went to bed at 6 P.M., got up at midnight, and worked for the remaining 18 hours. But he was wrong to drink such enormous quantities of coffee, thereby damaging his heart.—But on that sort of journey nothing is really any good. I didn't like Balzac's story. In the *Railroad News* I read an absurd remark attributed to Goethe, that Prague is "the most precious stone in the world's mural crown." The best part of the journey was getting out at Prague; altogether my state of mind improved the nearer we got to Prague. As I was about to get out, a small child tugged at my collar; I turned around and saw a young woman with a child in her arms. Again she reminded me very much of you, at least at first glance, and again it wasn't her face or any particular feature, but only the general impression, and therefore especially undeniable. It may be that your image is constantly before my eyes. No one has ever helped this young woman out of a carriage with as much care as I did then. Anyway, she needed help, for she was carrying the child in her arms and couldn't see the steps.

Of course you must tell me about that trip you made, and as much as possible! I thought it strange enough at the time that one should choose that kind of trip for a holiday; you were not in the country, nor did you visit any particularly interesting foreign cities. If relatives expect one to visit them, they should first go to the Riviera, and then invite one. Incidentally, I followed you to some extent on that journey, though unobtrusively. I too have an old friend in Breslau (not the pious one I told you about, he lives in the country, is a surveyor, and for his address I should have to look in the Bible he gave me as a souvenir). This friendship, because I am a lazy correspondent, continues on the whole in silence. But when I assumed you might be in Breslau, I wrote to him out of the blue, after an interval of many months, in order to be part of—at least by letter—the Breslau you happened to be in.[75] I didn't make that quite clear to myself at the time, but it was exactly that; there was no strong reason for the letter, or rather there was none at all.

By the way, do you keep a diary? Have you ever kept one? And that reminds me: Why don't you ever tell me anything about your

girl friend, the one you said was such an intimate friend?

Farewell, dearest. The threat that hangs over us and which I mentioned earlier on, should be left undisturbed until such time as we can exchange the first real words, not written ones. Don't you agree?

Please don't look upon this letter as a relapse, we are in the new age though it has been dimmed by the disruption of my writing.

Your hand, Felice! Franz

> Am I right that both our mothers have started worrying about us at the same time? Does your mother say nice or merely indifferent things about me? And why did she think of me the moment you talked about your friend from Breslau? Please answer all my questions!

*On a separate page, enclosed*:

I must not forget the outcome of the real purpose of my journey, for it too shows the hostile character of the trip. I was successful, or rather my Institute was successful. Whereas I thought I should get 300 kronen, I got 4500, that is, about 4000 kronen extra. "You should have resisted the success," I said to myself on the return journey while watching the rooks above snow-covered fields.

November 26, 1912

Now, late at night, I have had a consoling thought: your Monday letter may have arrived after all, but someone failed to give it to the porter. In that case I should get it first thing tomorrow, and perhaps another at 10! The office gets nastier in contrast to your letters, but because they come to the office, it also gets nicer.

November 27, 1912

Dearest, it was 11:15 A.M., I had just escaped from work for a little while, found myself in my usual state of agitation, and started a letter, the first line of which I enclose. Then fortunately your postcard with the picture arrived. (Nor did your Monday letter arrive until today.) Yes, dearest, that's right, that's what I want, at least the promised news, but that without fail—no matter how trivial. For example, I don't want you to write to me at night, I won't give in about that; I even think that last night my mediocre writing was due to your writing to me at the same time of night (secretly I say to myself: pray God that you should have done it), but once a night letter is written, then I want to get it. On your postcard you say you wrote on Monday night. Well, I haven't had that letter. What shall I do? When I need every line you write! According to that postcard I may be getting 2 letters tomorrow, but I am sure to get only one, perhaps none. My hands feel as though they will slide off the table from helplessness and longing for you.

I am sure all my letters also get lost—the one from Kratzau, from Reichenberg, this morning's letter, the ordinary, the registered, the express letters, all of them. For instance, you say I wrote only a few lines on Sunday night, whereas I sent you at least 8 pages and an infinite sigh. Dearest, if our mail doesn't bring us together soon, we shall never get together.

The new photograph makes me feel strange. I feel closer to the little girl, could say anything to her, but for the young lady I feel too much respect. I keep thinking: though it is Felice, it is also a grown-up young lady, and what's more, very much of a young lady. She is gay, not that the little girl was sad, just terribly serious; she has a full face (due perhaps to the effect of probable evening light), the little girl was pale. If I had to choose between them in real life, I wouldn't rush up to the little girl without hesitating—no, I wouldn't do that, but I would nevertheless advance, even though very slowly, toward the little girl, while all the time turning to glance at the young lady, never letting her out of my sight. Nicest of course would be if the little girl then took me up to the young lady, and commended me to her.

By the way, what was this photograph of which you send only part? Why don't I get all of it? Because it's a poor picture? So you really don't think I am capable of seeing the best in you, even in a poor picture? Judging by the piece of white frill around your neck, which shows in the picture and could belong to a blouse, I almost suspect it is a photograph of you dressed as Pierrot; if so, it would be too bad of you to withhold the picture, and anyway it's wrong to cut photographs, the more so if they are to be sent to someone who yearns for the sight of you as much as I do.

My idea of your company was more or less right, but I should never have thought that the confounded din of 1500 gramophones would emanate from it every day. How many people's nerves are you guilty of shattering, dearest lady? Have you thought of that? There were times when I was obsessed with the idea that a gramophone will and must be installed somewhere near our apartment, and that would be my ruin. It didn't happen; your Prague branch (whose address I still don't know, and whose manager once took you to Hradčany Castle, which I won't easily forgive) doesn't seem to be working hard enough; you should come and give them a thorough inspection lasting days, weeks, a lifetime. Even so, 1500 gramophones! And surely, before being sent off, they must have shrieked at least once. Poor Felice! Are the walls thick enough to protect you from the first 1500 shrieks? That's why you take aspirin. As for me, I don't even have to hear a gramophone; their very existence I consider a threat. I liked them only in Paris; Pathé have a showroom there on one of the boulevards, with Pathephones, where for a small coin one can listen to a prodigious program (chosen from a fat catalogue). You should do this in Berlin, if it isn't done already. Do you also sell records? I shall order 1000 records with your voice, and all you need say is that you grant me as many kisses as I need to forget all sorrow.

Yours. Franz

*The enclosed first sentence*:

[CZECH LETTERHEAD OF THE WORKERS' ACCIDENT INSURANCE INSTITUTE: Úrazová pojišťovna dělnická]

Dearest, when you are too busy to write at length, I beg you to adopt the habit of sending me a postcard, telling me in 3 words that you are well.

November 27, 1912

Dearest, why does one end letters with kisses when letters themselves are so unimportant that, confronted by your longed-for and yet unimaginable presence, paper and pen would turn into nothingness, which, in fact, they already are. Really, Felice, when I sit here all alone at night after writing rather badly as I have these past two days (the story progresses in a dull, placid way, illuminated only by moments of the essential clarity); when in this far from perfect state of mind I try to imagine our next meeting, I sometimes fear that seeing you would be unbearable to me, whether in the street, the office, or your home; so unbearable that no one, not even you, should witness it, and that I could bear it only when I am so utterly confused and in such a haze that I should be unworthy to appear before you. Fortunately, however, you are not a statue, but alive, and very much alive, so perhaps all will be well once you have offered me your hand, and my face might get to look human again before long.

You ask about my Christmas vacation. Unfortunately I haven't a calendar by me. Of course I only get the two holidays off, but since 3 vacation days are still due to me before the end of the year (a precious possession, the thought of using it has kept me going for months) and the holidays, I understand, are so placed that by fitting in 2 of my 3 days, plus the Sunday, would give me 5 or even 6 free days, so if I use those two days I should have quite a reasonable Christmas vacation. Actually I was quite determined to use these days solely for my novel, perhaps even to finish it. And now that the novel has not been touched for more than a week, and the new

story, though nearing its end, has been trying for the past 2 days to make me believe I have been all wrong, I should be more than ever determined to stick to my resolution. I shall lose one day of the Christmas vacation anyway, on account of my sister's wedding; that will be the 22nd. Besides, I can't remember ever having traveled at Christmas; to go rolling off one day, rolling back the next: the futility of such an undertaking has always overwhelmed me. Well, dearest, what about your Christmas vacation? Will you stay in Berlin in spite of your great need for relaxation? You wanted to go up into the mountains. Where? Any place where you would be accessible to me? You see, I was determined not to show my face until I had finished the novel, but I ask myself, *though only tonight*, would I be more worthy or at least less unworthy of you, dearest, after finishing it than before? And is it not more important to allow my poor eyes to feast on you than to give free rein to my mania for writing for 6 consecutive days and nights? You say. For myself, I answer with a big "Yes."

Franz

November 28, 1912

Dearest Felice, we are being made fools of by the mail. I got your Tuesday letter yesterday, and complained about Monday night's letter being lost, and here it is today, Thursday morning. Somewhere within this rigid organization of postal services, there seems to be some diabolical official who is playing about with our letters, letting them go according to his whim—if only he really would let them all go! I also got Tuesday night's letter, nocturnal letters without exception, thus in fact an (immensely gratifying) mockery of my plea not to write at night. Don't do it again, please, Felice; though it makes me happy, don't do it, in any case not until your nerves are calmer. And tell me about your weeping. Why does it come over you? For no reason? You are just sitting at your table, and suddenly you are in tears? Yes, dearest, but then you should be in bed, and not at rehearsals. I am especially frightened of tears. I

cannot cry. To me other people's tears are a strange, incomprehensible phenomenon. In the course of many years I have cried only once, that was two or three months ago; but then I was literally shaking in my armchair, twice in quick succession; I was afraid my uncontrollable sobs would wake my parents next door; it happened at night and was brought about by a particular passage in my novel. But your weeping, dearest, is worrying, or do you cry so very easily? Have you always? Is it partly my fault? But I'm sure it is. Tell me, has anyone who has so much to thank you for ever tormented you for no reason (no reason on your side) as I have? You don't have to tell me. I know. But I didn't do it wantonly, that surely you know, or feel, Felice. But I am haunted by your tears. They can't be due only to general anxiety; you are not spoiled; there must be a particular, clearly explicable reason for them. Name it, I beg you, for you may not know that a word from you has immense power over me; take advantage of it to the full, if the anxiety and the tears should have any connection with me. You must make it absolutely plain in your reply to this letter. Perhaps really the only reason is that we write to each other too often. I am enclosing the letter I began on that telegram-Sunday, but didn't dare finish at the time because of my misery when the second mail brought nothing. Read it like an ancient document. I no longer agree with every word I wrote then, but your tears reminded me of it.

I am writing in great haste, there is a lot more I could say to you, but time is not my own this afternoon, and probably won't be for several more to come. May I kiss your beautiful moist eyes?

Franz

*The enclosed unfinished letter of November 18, 1912*:
Dearest, today my office work starts with this letter, but at the moment can there really be anything more important for either of us than what follows? Please answer at once, and in your wisdom I hope you will agree with me, for if you don't I fear I could not resist your opinion. Just keep in mind, you are strong enough to bear things I could not possibly bear, and when things become

unbearable for me I inevitably pull you down to my level with the irresistible force of my weakness; you saw it happen last week. So listen, it is due to nothing but fear and apprehension that makes me take these precautions: Writing two letters a day, as I have been doing lately, is sweet madness, nothing else. (The first mail has just arrived, and no letter from you. For heaven's sake, could you still be ill?) It can't go on like this. We are lashing each other with all these letters. They can't create a presence, only a mixture of presence and distance that becomes unbearable. Dearest, we must not drive each other into the state we have been in lately; that mustn't happen, come what may, if only for your sake. Nevertheless, when writing this kind of letter I foresee a certain point in one of your future letters, in which again you will reproach me mildly and gently for one of my letters, and this will throw me into a state of worry and despair. Although things between us can't ever again be as bad as they were the other day, they can still be bad enough. Let us spare each other for better days, should God ever grant them to us, which at the moment of course I can't even imagine. Let love unite us, not despair. And that is why I beg you, let us put an end to this flood of letters that produces nothing but delusion, which makes one dizzy. To me they are indispensable, yet I beg you nevertheless. If you agree, I shall get used to writing less often, but certainly not otherwise, for it's a poison that lodges in the pit of one's stomach. Suggest how we should do it; I will listen to you, not to myself. Remember: to write when one has the urge to do so is not a proper solution; it is merely a further lashing, for the craving to write, and to read your letters, is with me every God-given moment of my life. Meanwhile I believe the restraint

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*The following remarks are written on the same page*:

November 28, 1912

I don't know how old I was in this one. At that time I think I still belonged completely to myself, and it seems to have suited me very well. As the eldest, I was constantly being photographed and there exists a long succession of transformations. From now on it gets

worse in every picture, but you'll see. In the very next one I appear as my parents' ape.

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I have now got ready for you a copy of Max's *Intensity of Feeling*.[76] Bound beautifully in green leather, although not spotlessly clean. (Is there such a thing as spotlessly clean leather?) I could send it now (it's just out, and is Max's latest book), but I want to take it along to the Brods' first, to get Max to write something nice in it for you. Then I'll send it at once.

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So you've never read anything by Baum? I really will have to send you something soon. He has been totally blind from the age of 7; he is now roughly my age, married, with a splendid little boy. As a matter of fact Baum gave a lecture in Berlin not so very long ago, and there was a lot about him in the Berlin papers.

November 28, 1912

Dog-tired, dearest, I still venture to write a few lines, because I must. The afternoon was sacrificed to the office; I didn't sleep, and therefore can't go on writing, but now, in its usual insidious way, the urge to write is overpowering. The devil take it! Will things ever improve? Felice, open your eyes and let me look into them; if my present is in them, why shouldn't I find my future in them too?

By the way, I have been talking to several people today, in particular to a painter from Berlin,[77] and I have noticed that my self-imposed isolation may perhaps have made me imperceptibly (imperceptible to me, not to you, dearest) quite unpalatable. When among strangers, the first satisfactory result, though only momentarily satisfactory, is that one loses the greater part of one's sense of responsibility, with which, in the permanently strained relationship with oneself, one has to be equipped to the very tips of one's fingers. One begins to hope the burdens imposed upon one may secretly be common to all, and therefore their weight shared by all. A mistaken but pleasant thought! There is sympathy everywhere, from all sides people hasten to help, and even the reluctant and undecided person is propelled toward his salvation

with great cheerfulness put on by all for the occasion. Once I enjoy a person, that joy knows no bounds. I can never have enough physical contact with that person; this sounds indecent, but I like walking arm in arm with him, then I withdraw my arm, and the moment I feel like it, put it back again; all the time I want to get him to talk, not in order to hear what he wishes to say, rather to hear what I want to hear. This painter for example (his self-portrait is enclosed) has a great urge to hold forth about theories on art, no doubt subjectively true, but all the same as feeble and easy to snuff out as a candle. On the other hand, I only wanted (and that's why it was doubly important to take the poor painter's arm and drag him this way and that) to hear that he has been married for a year, is happy, works all day, lives in 2 rooms in a house in a. garden at Wilmersdorf, and other such things which arouse envy and courage.

Goodnight. Franz

[CZECH LETTERHEAD OF THE WORKERS' ACCIDENT INSURANCE INSTITUTE]

November 29, 1912

Today, dearest, I received only Wednesday night's letter, so have news of you only up to the moment you mailed the letter on Thursday morning. And indeed a lot of time has gone by since then. But I am not at all anxious, because you don't want me to be, but in fact my composure lasts only as long as you maintain your composure. You must be in an awful muddle just now with those rehearsals; I shall be very glad for your sake when it's all over. Will you have a part? What will it be? Incidentally, you've been neglecting me, dearest: had I ever been "Humor," I should have sent you my part long ago. If your script were here, I should learn it by heart in spite of my bad memory (because forces other than those of memory would come to my assistance), and in my room at night I should declaim it boldly. But those dreams of which I am the cause, dearest; they are sinister, unhappy, and make me wonder. Am I fated to torment you not only when you are awake, but even in your sleep?

That first photograph of yours is very dear to me, for the little girl no longer exists, and so the photograph is all there is. But the other picture only portrays your dear presence, and my yearning carries my glance beyond the disquieting little picture. *Geistesgenie* [intellectual genius] is like a word in a dream, senseless, yet profoundly true; it did not surprise me at all to find the dream-story on the next page. By the way, why is the earlier photograph full of holes?

But now I must stop, dearest, and will mail this half-finished letter, for I don't know whether I shall be able to write again before late tonight.

Again we have been of one mind. In your last letter you remind me of my photograph; I got that letter probably the very moment you received mine, written yesterday, with the picture in it. But there is also something unfulfilled. Both letters say we want to meet, but it does not happen.

Fräulein Brühl's latest little poem is again a splendid achievement, far better than the poem by the gentleman, which is quite creditable too. What did she do to deserve a scolding? At this point do look at the girl (I assume she is sitting in your room) and salute her silently on my behalf.

Is it a mere coincidence that your firm started making Parlographs at about the time you joined them, or have you been in that department ever since it started? Do I ask too many questions? You must be buried by a mountain of questions by now. No need to hurry over your replies. I shall never stop asking. Adieu for a little while. Especially beautiful handwriting today, isn't it?

Yours, Franz

November 30, 1912

[Night of November 29 to 30, 1912]

Tired, you are sure to be tired, my Felice, when you pick up this letter, and I must make an effort to write clearly to spare your sleepy eyes. Wouldn't you rather leave the letter unread for the

moment, lie back, and go on sleeping for a few more hours after this week of noise and rush? The letter won't fly away, but will be quite happy to wait on your bedcover until you wake up.

I can't tell you exactly what time it is while I am writing this letter, because my watch is on a chair not far away and I don't dare get up and look; it must be nearly morning. But I didn't get to my desk until after midnight. In the spring and summer—I don't yet know from experience, for my nightly vigils are of recent date—one will not be able to stay awake undisturbed through three hours, for dawn will come on and drive one to bed, but now in these long, unchanging nights the world forgets about one, even if one doesn't forget about it.

My work moreover has been so bad that I don't deserve any sleep, and should be condemned to spend the rest of the night looking out of the window. Can you understand this, dearest: to write badly, yet feel compelled to write, or abandon oneself to total despair! To have to atone for the joys of good writing in this terrible way! In fact, not to be really unhappy, not to be pierced by a fresh stab of unhappiness, but to see the pages being covered endlessly with things one hates, that fill one with loathing, or at any rate with dull indifference, that nevertheless have to be written down in order that one shall live. Disgusting! If only I could destroy the pages I have written in the last 4 days, as though they had never been.

But what sort of a good-morning is this? Is this the way to welcome one's beloved on a beautiful Sunday morning? Well, one welcomes her the way one can, you wouldn't want it otherwise. If sleep has not been completely driven out by my complaints and you can find some more, then I'm satisfied. And, as my farewell, I add that everything is definitely, quite definitely going to be better, and you need not worry. Surely I can't be utterly thrown out of my writing after having thought more than once that I was sitting in its center, settled in its comforting warmth.

But now not another word, only kisses, and many of them for a thousand reasons—because it's Sunday, because the festivities are over, because the weather is fine, or maybe because the weather is bad, because I write badly, and because I hope my writing will

improve, and because I know so little about you and kisses are the only means of discovering something that counts, and because after all you are very sleepy and can't offer any resistance.

Goodnight! Have a pleasant Sunday!

Yours, Franz

[CZECH LETTERHEAD OF THE WORKERS' ACCIDENT INSURANCE INSTITUTE]

November 30, 1912

Dearest, wherever I am you must be in my thoughts, which is why I am writing to you at my chief's desk, while deputizing for him. Your long letter and the two postcards made me so happy today! Incidentally, in the usual crazy fashion, Friday night's letter, written later, arrived before the 2 postcards. I w (a telephone call from my director has just called me back to my business; he hardly succeeded.) As I was saying, I was in the tobacconist's buying a stamp for the letter you will get on Sunday, the mail permitting (dearest, I tell you, letters do get, do get lost, or I am suffering from persecution mania); our mailman happened to be standing next to me, with your letter on top of the bundle; I grabbed it with such force that I nearly upset the whole lot.

What tremendous preparations you people are making! I shall expect to get the commemorative program at once. What kind of a debate was that about the Russian Ballet? Is it part of the play?[78] Please don't worry about me, I am more or less all right, at least I don't cry, don't throw myself across the sofa, and worry only because you do. You know, there are wonderful sanatoria in this wide world. I shall have to tell you about them shortly. Please explain why your fellow actors take pity on you and make allowances on account of your nerves; surely you are not always in a state of nerves; everyone is bound to be nervous during the festival preparations, and nervous people know no pity. Be calm, it is a splendid idea of yours that we should both be calm out of consideration for each other; I have been practicing this unconsciously for a long time, but seldom succeed, by your anxiety I

see how rarely I succeed. I trust you implicitly, don't misunderstand me, how could I love someone and go on living, if I didn't trust him? But there is evil on my side, only on my side, and sometimes it overflows and frightens you. Sometimes I think if we were to unite against it, it could not persist; then again I think I know better.

But now I really must stop, a Head of Department can't write letters to his beloved. There are about 70 employees in our department; if they were all to follow their chief's example, as would be right and proper, it would result in a dreadful state of affairs.

By the way, how is little Fräulein Brühl? Was she puzzled by my postcard? Perhaps in the end she never got it—which, according to a deep-seated conviction of mine, seems the most likely.

I enclose an invitation to a reading.[79] I shall be reading your short story ["The Judgment"]. Believe me, you will be there, even if you stay in Berlin. To appear in public with your story, and thus as it were with you, will be a strange feeling. The story is sad and painful, and no one will be able to explain my happy face during the reading.

Franz

*On a separate page, enclosed*:
Dearest! The devil take me! In my nocturnal absentmindedness I think I sent the Sunday letter to the office instead of to the apartment, as intended. This letter to the apartment I don't dare send express. There isn't much hope that it will get there on Sunday. At any rate the post office has a splendid opportunity to distinguish itself. Apologies!

Franz

December 1, 1912

Dearest Felice, after concluding the battle with my little story—a third but now quite definitely (how uncertain and full of mistakes

my writing is until I become accustomed to the real world) the final section has begun to take shape—I simply must say goodnight to you, dearest, although I shan't be mailing this letter before tomorrow evening. The extent to which I cling to you, dearest, frightens me; I keep telling myself it is wicked—may you never say so, dearest—and yet I cannot refrain. If I were with you I'm afraid I should never leave you alone—and yet my craving to be alone is continuous—we would both suffer, though of course it would mean a happiness well worth any amount of suffering.

I still know so little about your room, dearest, and when in my thoughts I try to follow you there I am lost and somewhat in the dark. When I try to remember your letters with that in mind, I merely find the mention of a "pretty desk" for which, however, you frequently substitute the bed; then on one occasion there was a reference to the blinds on a stormy night; no doubt the box for the letters is there too, and finally the books among which you once rummaged and found that charming photograph. (Who knows whether other photographs are not to be found there? You must surely have been photographed several times as a child, and also after your 12th year. Wherever a few girls gather together there are bound to be group photographs, that's inevitable.)

No, no more; today my watch is in my pocket, it's 2:45 (it was after 12 again before I got to my desk), and this time I shall and must get to bed before you. Oh, what a good time you are having, I can see you dancing with the chief clerk Salomon, then with the gentleman who writes poetry, then with all 6 gentlemen who were around your desk yesterday when you wrote to me. The two Copenhagen representatives may also have come to the firm's jubilee, though it's not very likely, and are also dancing. You make me quite giddy with all your dancing. And undoubtedly they all dance better than I do. Ah, if you could see me dance! You would throw up your arms! But please go on dancing, I am going to sleep, and to spite them all with the power of dreams, God willing, I shall draw you, dearest, out of the throng of dancers calmly to my side.

No letter, Felice, neither here nor at the office (I considered the miracle of a joint absentmindedness); there were, however, endless rehearsals that very Friday, and I, by my admittedly forced renunciation of your letter, also had a share in the success of your party. Let's hope you didn't spend all your energy on the rehearsals and weren't too tired for the party.

Today I am being robbed of the entire afternoon—relatives, a lecture by Eulenberg[80] (do you know any of his work?), and other little errands here and there. It will lead to nothing. I am absentminded and the shouts next door (the guest list for the wedding[81] is being compiled—every name, a shriek) make me feel quite numb.

How, I wonder, are you spending your Sunday? No doubt it started with a shock caused by me. I had to send the letter express, after all, I couldn't help myself. If it was foolish, please forgive me; if it was right, I claim no merit. One doesn't know what to do for the best. In the end I asked myself which I should choose: your letter with its shock and bother, or no letter and peace and quiet—needless to say, there was nothing to do but dash to the post office. Anyway—you now have the letter with its shock, while I have no letter—at least we are quits. In any case I believe that regardless of lost and frantic letters our caring for each other should remain quite unchanged. I hope you agree—for me it is a deeply felt command. Farewell, dearest, and now try to get some rest, consider neither your office, your family, nor me, relax to your heart's content on the sofa, this kind of furniture is made to laze on, not weep on. That, at least, is the opinion of

your Franz

November [December] 1, 1912

Dearest, only a few words, it's late, very late, and there's a lot of work to be done tomorrow, at last I am getting a little excited about my little story; my pounding heart is longing to drive me further and further into it, but I must try to extricate myself as best I can,

and since this is going to be hard work and it will be hours before I can get to sleep, I must hurry to bed.

Dearest, nearly the whole of my Sunday was devoted to you, with all its happy and unhappy thoughts. How quickly I became indifferent to the Eulenberg reading, how soon I was absorbed by you again! I left early, and my only walk took me to the station where I mailed my letter. Dearest, I have you still, I am still happy, but for how long? I say this without doubting you for a split second, dearest. But I am in your way, I hamper you, there will come a time when I shall have to step aside, whether sooner or later will be determined only by the extent of my selfishness. And it seems I shall never be able to do it in a frank and manly fashion; I shall always be thinking of myself, and should never, as would be my duty, succeed in withholding the truth: if I were to lose you, I should be lost. Dearest, my happiness seems so close at hand, only 8 railway-hours away, yet impossible and unthinkable.

Don't be alarmed, dearest, by these constantly recurring complaints, they won't be followed by another letter like the one I burst out with not long ago, but I absolutely must see you again and for long, for as long as possible, without clocks to measure the time, I must be with you—will it be possible this summer, or even in the spring?—but there are evenings when I have to complain away, for to suffer in silence is too hard.

Dearest, I wish I could say something amusing, but nothing comes naturally to my mind; moreover, all four characters on the page of my story that lies before me are in tears, or at any rate in a very unhappy frame of mind. But there is sure to be an amusing letter at 10 o'clock, and for that I deserve a kiss right now. With it on my lips I shall go to bed.

*On a single page, probably enclosed in one of the letters of December 1, 1912*:

Dearest, be so kind as to look at the posters to see whether the Jews are playing anywhere—above all, at what address, so that a letter may reach my Löwy. He has written to me again full of complaints

about himself, and about me for not writing. Unfortunately I have lost the envelope, so haven't his address.

[CZECH LETTERHEAD OF THE WORKERS' ACCIDENT INSURANCE INSTITUTE]

December 2, 1912

Dearest, so the miracle of our combined absentmindedness, assisted by postal negligence, has happened. Your letter meant for Sunday has only just arrived at the office. A letter of Friday night—from the distant past; I hope all went well. So you are staying in Berlin over Christmas? There will be relatives, visits to be paid, there will be dancing, and one party after another—and this is how you intend to rest? It seems you need it so badly, since even casual visitors notice that you don't look well. Anyway, I note that photographs were taken on Saturday, so I shall soon see how bad things are with you.

My Christmas travels have become even more uncertain because my sister's wedding—which will be celebrated only within the family circle, but it is a very big one—has been postponed until the 25th, thus threatening to disrupt the whole preceding Christmas vacation for me. But you too have visitors who might bar me from Berlin, and where else would I go? Well, there is still time and therefore hope.

If only I had better news about your health! That night you looked so fresh, even pink-cheeked, and indestructible. Did I fall in love with you at once, that night? Haven't I told you already? At first sight I was quite definitely and incomprehensibly indifferent to you, and for this reason you may have seemed familiar. I took it all as a matter of course.[82] Not until we rose from the table in the dining room did I notice to my horror how quickly the time had passed, how sad that was, and how one would have to hurry, but I didn't know how, or what for. But as soon as we reached the music room—you had just gone off to get your shoes—I made the silly remark, perhaps even aloud: "She (you were still "she" at that time) appeals to me no end," and I held on to the table.

What a lot has happened between that evening and your visitor's[83] question about your unhappy love! And since to blush is to admit, your blushes on that occasion, though you may not know it, implied the following: "Yes, he loves me, but for me it is a great misfortune. For he thinks that because he loves me he is free to torment me, and takes full advantage of this imaginary privilege. Almost every day comes a letter tormenting me to death, but then of course there comes another which is meant to make me forget the first; but how can I forget it? He always talks in riddles; one can't get a candid word out of him. It is possible that what he wants to say cannot be written, but then, for heaven's sake, he should stop it altogether and write like a sensible person. He doesn't torment me deliberately, for he loves me, I know, beyond all measure, but he ought to stop tormenting me and making me so miserable with his love." Dearest speaker! I would give my life for you, but I cannot give up tormenting you.

Yours, Franz

December 3, 1912

[Evening of December 2, and night of December 2 to 3, 1912]

That wonderful, long, excessively and undeservedly long letter! Dearest, you made me so happy. And with it the picture, strange at first, because of your unfamiliar posture and surroundings, but the longer one looks the more it falls into place, till now, in the light of the lamp on my desk—as in the sunlight of long ago—the dearest face becomes so lifelike that one longs to kiss the hand on the edge of the boat, and does. At that time you looked in better health than you do now; on the other hand—perhaps because of all that well-being—you looked extremely sulky. What were you holding? A peculiar little bag? And who had stuck the leaves in your belt? You look at me so warily and suspiciously, as though you had a slight premonition of the tormentor who would come to plague you 4 years later. Also, for a mere outing you were very carefully dressed; so was your brother. I had been told before that your brother is

good-looking. How ridiculously young I should look beside him, and I am probably older than he. And in that picture he is only 25. You must be very proud of him.

And now you hold out hopes of more pictures. Dearest, you must keep this promise. One can't tell from the envelope, one rips it open as though it were just a letter (some letters arrive all but open, it depends on the constitution of the envelope), but then one finds a picture inside and you yourself slip out of it, as one fine day I will see you getting out of a railway carriage. That flash photograph, dearest, will also be mine, whether on loan or forever, no matter how it will have turned out. To rid you of all doubts (not for the sake of creating any doubts), I am sending you a flash photograph of myself. It is rather repulsive, but then it was meant not for you but for a power of attorney for the Institute, and was taken some 2–3 years ago. I haven't in fact got a twisted face; it's the flash that gives me that visionary look, and I have long ago abandoned high collars. On the other hand the suit is the once or twice mentioned one-and-only (one-and-only is of course an exaggeration, but not a great one), and I am wearing it today as cheerfully as ever. I have caused quite a sensation in it in the best seats at Berlin theaters, in the front row at the Kammerspiele, and I have slept or dozed in it through entire nights on seats of railway carriages. It is aging with me. But of course it's no longer as good as in the picture. The tie is a real showpiece; I bought it on a trip to Paris, not even the last trip, but the first, the date of which I can't work out at the moment.[84] By pure chance I happen to be wearing this tie now, while I am writing. It too is getting older. Above all, please don't be alarmed by this picture. Only one good picture of me has been taken recently (a photograph is good only if, failing all else, one looks as one would like to look), but this one is in a frame with other family photographs. If possible, I shall have a copy made for you; to me it means so much that you should hold me in your hands, at least in a photograph, your real hands I mean, for I have been in your imaginary hands for a long time.

That was written this evening, it's now night, at its deepest. Dearest, considering there was no letter yesterday, wasn't my behavior exemplary? So completely at one with you, as if you were beside me, but had had one of your silent days. In any case, I am sure you never have such days of depression, in spite of your tears—your only failing, and a terrible temptation to rush to you and hold you close—I am sure your self-control is infinitely greater than mine. Consider carefully whether you could stand someone who for days, most days, is so turned in upon himself that nothing can budge him. About a week ago there were several such days; I don't know whether you noticed it in my letters (about a week ago!); in any case say you didn't notice, that it was just my imagination. It would reassure me coming from your lips, whence I expect all decisions about me to come.

Your party was magnificent beyond compare. I don't know what it is that makes the whole factory, against all reason, in spite of your indisputable testimony, in spite of everything I know about it, seem completely (your awfully untidy correspondent's writing paper has just run out, and all stationers are asleep), yes, completely unreal. Perhaps this is because I have surrounded you with so many wishes and hopes that in no way fit a real business organization, but would be perfect in an unreal one. This is also why I take such pleasure in hearing about your office; if I were deeply convinced that it really surrounds you and makes you work, I would hate it. Am I to get the pictures of the office? If so, you will get something like our Institute's annual report with an article by me on cylindrical safety cutter spindles! With illustrations! Or even an article on workshop insurance! Or one about safety cutter heads! Dearest, there are many pleasures in store for you.[85]

But now I am going to bed. I have had too little sleep lately, I also don't walk enough, I don't read at all, but there are times when I don't feel too bad. I am toying with ideas for the Christmas vacation, the summer vacation, and the future as a whole. As soon as the outlook darkens, I shut my eyes.—Before I forget: from now on, as a rule, I shall write *only once a day*; I am being deprived of

the afternoons. But I am given kisses. And for them I can put up with anything.

Franz

[CZECH LETTERHEAD OF THE WORKERS' ACCIDENT INSURANCE INSTITUTE]

December 3, 1912

Dearest, just two words. Our elections,[86] which I may have told you about, are over, my free time at the office is up. I can only salute you in haste. Moreover I am deep in a daze of terrible sleepiness. Dearest, today you presented me with a wonderful gift and this morning's letter drew me toward you as though with human hands.

Farewell till tonight. It is so difficult to break the habit of two letters a day. Tell me the cure. With kisses I ask you for the cure, and with kisses I thank you for it.

Yours, as no one else's, Franz

I am sending the annual reports; when you know them by heart, you will get more.

December 3, 1912

Dearest, I really should have gone on writing all night. It would have been my duty, for I am nearing the end of my little story, and uniformity and the fire of consecutive hours would do this end an immense amount of good. And who knows whether I shall be able to write tomorrow after the reading[87]—I curse it now. Nevertheless, I am stopping, I dare not risk it. It is not so long since I started writing regularly and continuously, but since then I have turned from a by no means exemplary, but in some ways rather useful employee (my present rank is Draftsman) into a nightmare to my chief. My desk at the office was certainly never tidy, but now it is littered with a chaotic pile of papers and files; I may just know the things that lie on top, but lower down I suspect nothing but horrors. Sometimes I think I can almost hear myself being ground down, by my writing on the one hand, by the office on the other. At other times I keep them both reasonably well balanced, especially when my writing at home has gone badly, but this ability (not the ability to write badly) is, I'm afraid, gradually declining. Sometimes I look around the office with an expression that no one would ever have believed possible in an office. At such moments my typist is the only person who can still gently wake me. And now that we calmly love each other, your letters are also a definite help in my life; someone, and not just someone but the loved one, cares for me, and after reading your letters I jump up and go to work in a better frame of mind. And yet, and yet——

I have written so little today, and there is so much to tell you. How pretty you look in the display room! But your office is missing. No, I shall have to question you for months, most patient Felice, about the things you sent me today. Above all, do explain the two references to yourself. No doubt the first refers to your Zionism, but the second about literature and frozen meat? God, from Salomon to Rosenbaum, how well these people know you! They can see you every day, can ride with you in motor cars, need only press a button in the director's office, and you come running. Dearest, dearest, where is the bell that calls you to me? I overwhelm you with kisses.

—But now enough. My story would keep me awake, but the dreams you inspire will put me to sleep. Yesterday, lying in the grass, I talked to you about our going to the country together.

Yours, Franz

December 4, 1912

Thank God, dearest, that by the time you reached the end of your letter you were calmer; I should not have known where to turn with self-reproaches. So now I promise as best I can—I wish I had Frl. Brühl's lips that kissed you while you were writing, so as to emphasize it more strongly—that (to make it more solemn I am printing it) I SHALL NEVER AGAIN TORMENT YOU BY LETTER, but will save it up until we meet, when amends can be made at once and properly for all misdeeds, not crudely and belatedly as by a subsequent letter.

You say yourself that I do not want to torment you; you are my own self, which I do torment from time to time, it's good for it; but you are my innermost, my most delicate self which, more than anything, I should like to protect and preserve in perfect peace. Yet despite the best of intentions—it must be my pen going its own wicked ways in my hand.

Dearest! Forgive me, and from now on the letters shall be gentle, as is right and proper when writing to one's beloved whom one longs not to chastise but to caress.

I remember now, even last night I was exaggerating. Things are more or less all right at the office. And even if I am a heap of misery, after getting your letter and reading it, I feel like a giant, and like an eager official I advance toward the waiting typewriter, just as though you were leading me to it and had promised to reward me with a kiss if I had done my work properly. Don't be sad, dearest! You succeeded in making me happy before you even meant to, how much more so now. Adieu, dearest, am I quite incapable of saying goodbye today? And now, off to the typewriter! By the way, this is the last of the twice-daily letters; from now on there will be

one only. Explanation to follow. I can't get away from you today, dearest. It's you who must pull your hand away when I am so crazy.

Franz

[Night of December 4 to 5, 1912]

Oh dearest, infinitely beloved, it really is too late now for my little story, as I feared it would be; unfinished, it will lie turned heavenwards until tomorrow night; but for you, Felice, childish lady, this is the right moment, just as every moment is the right moment for you. The telegram I take as a kiss, which makes it taste good, makes for pleasure, pride, and conceit, but as a congratulation, dearest? Any other evening is more important than this one, which after all was devoted solely to my pleasure, whereas other evenings are meant for my liberation. Frankly, dearest, I simply adore reading aloud; bellowing into the audience's expectant and attentive ear warms the cockles of the poor heart. And bellow I certainly did, simply blowing away the music from adjoining rooms that was trying to spare me the trouble of reading aloud. Nothing, you know, gives the body greater satisfaction than ordering people about, or at least believing in one's ability to do so. As a child—which I was until a few years ago—I used to enjoy dreaming of reading aloud to a large, crowded hall (though equipped with somewhat greater strength of heart, voice, and intellect than I had at the time) the whole of *Education sentimentale* at one sitting, for as many days and nights as it required, in French of course (oh dear, my accent!), and making the walls reverberate. Whenever I have given a talk, and talking is even better than reading aloud (it's happened rarely enough), I have felt this elation, and this evening was no exception. It is—and therein lies my excuse—the only more or less public entertainment I have allowed myself in the past three months. In all that time I have hardly spoken to a stranger. With the exception of the one and only Stocssl;[88] your Schmitz[89] whom I should have met a fortnight ago—it was almost exclusively his connection with you that attracted me to him—I missed by

oversleeping. Do you know Stoessl? He is a splendid man! The power of creating character is written all over his face, which otherwise, with its apoplectic complexion and hooked nose, might be that of a Jewish butcher. (But wait, there is a picture of him here in a catalogue, which I enclose.) I am carrying on in a somewhat disorganized way, but if I can't do that to you, dearest, to whom else can I do it? Moreover I am sure it is all due to the reading, the remains of which still cling to my fingertips. To have something inconspicuous yet something of yours near at hand, I took along your picture postcard from the party, and decided to let my hand rest on it quite quietly during the reading, and thus—by means of the simplest magic—have your support. But as the story began to take hold of me, I began at first to play with the card, then squeezed it and bent it without thinking. Just as well the card wasn't your dear hand; had it been, you wouldn't be able to write to me tomorrow, and that would have made it far too costly an evening for me. But you don't even know your little story ["The Judgment"] yet. It is somewhat wild and meaningless and if it didn't express some inner truth (which can never be universally established, but has to be accepted or denied every time by each reader or listener in turn), it would be nothing. It is also hard to imagine how, being so short (17 typewritten pages), it could have so many faults; and I really don't know what right I have to dedicate to you such a very doubtful creation. But we each give what we can, I the little story with myself as an appendage, you the immense gift of your love. Oh dearest, how happy I am through you; tears of happiness mingled with the single tear the end of your story brought to my eyes.[90]

Tell me, how can I show myself worthy of such a letter as today's, its second page in particular filled with nothing but the torment I criminally extorted from you? And how relieved I felt when on the third page, with the memories of that journey not yet overshadowed by me, a certain calm descended on you. But look, what playthings of fate we humans are; you complain that you left Prague without anyone coming to the station to see you off, while I—at least so I think in retrospect—I would have liked nothing better than to come along and stand on the running board of your carriage, just to look

into your compartment. (But this is crazy, I could so easily have got in—but now, at this hour of night the most difficult task, performed for the loved one, does not seem difficult enough.) It has just occurred to me that in one of your recent letters you wrote “you” instead of “me”; imagine this error one day becoming reality! (Calm! Calm! All right, I am keeping my mouth shut.)—Well, I have caught you out for once about the branch office—don’t deny it! don’t deny it!—you haven’t got a proper branch office in Prague. Of course I discovered the firm of Adler a long time ago, and each time I went past I spat, thinking they were rivals of yours, just as I do when passing a certain gramophone company. By the way, are you taking my advice and opening a gramophone shop on Friedrichstrasse? If it paid its way, you could open another, somewhere in the West End. In Paris an impressive lady sat on a raised seat in the middle of the room and did nothing but use one hand to exchange the visitors’ money for counters. How would it be if, as the instigator of this enterprise in Berlin, you were to get that job? I suggest this only because you could then use your other hand, the one not required for your duties, to write letters to me all day long. Dearest, what nonsense my longing for you makes me invent. Dearest, I am getting very depressed about myself. Had I strung together the hours spent in writing to you and used them for a trip to Berlin, I should have been with you long ago, and could be looking into your eyes. And here I am, writing pages of absurdities as though life went on forever and ever and not a moment less.

No, I am not going to write any more, I have lost all inclination. I will go to bed and repeat to myself Felice! Felice! the name that can do anything, excite and soothe. Goodnight, and sweet dreams, as they say. Just one more question. How do you manage to write in bed? Where is the inkpot? Do you hold the paper on your knees? I couldn’t do that, yet your writing is firmer than mine when I am sitting at my desk. And don’t your blankets get spattered with ink? And your poor, poor back! And your precious eyes are bound to be ruined. Here, as opposed to China, it’s the man who wants to take the light from his love.[91] But this does not mean that he is more reasonable than the Chinese bookworm (in Chinese literature one

keeps coming across this combination of ridicule and respect for the "bookworm"), for though he is against his beloved writing letters at night, he avidly grabs these same night letters from the mailman.

Now farewell, dearest, one last kiss. I am signing myself

Franz

and am alone. But I am not alone, for I assume I may kiss you after my signature as well. Dearest, if when we actually meet it is as hard for me to take leave of you as it is now, you will realize that the pain I caused you by letter was as nothing compared to the burdens imposed by personal contact with me. Adieu, dearest. This new letter, since my last signature, demands a new lot of kisses, and receives them in imagination.

[IN THE MARGIN] Well, there won't be another letter today.

December 5, 1912

Dearest, just greetings and thanks for the description of your room. Only the back wall is still missing; I imagine there is another door. Have you got many books?

So I didn't write to you about the elections? But I did, I did. It must have been in one of the many lost letters. Now, for example, I remember I complained that your letters were among the immense election correspondence, and about how long it took to sort them out.[92] They are the elections to our board, and it creates quite a lot of work, since all employers insured with us (around 200,000) and all employees (around 3,000,000) have a vote. This year I shirked this work, and my backlog could accumulate somewhat unnoticed. But now it's beginning to crack here and there.

Dearest, don't deny it, I appear quite strange to you in that picture. You don't want to admit it to yourself, but your letter betrays you—at any rate if one reads it with suspicion, as I admit I did this time. What can I do? That's how I look. The picture is bad,

but it is a good likeness; in reality I look even worse. It is 2 years old, but my youthful appearance has hardly changed, though my night vigils are beginning to produce some nasty lines. Will you be able to get used to this picture, dearest? And may this man still kiss you, or does he have to sign unkissed? After all, the picture is bearable, but what will happen when the man himself appears?—You might run away from him altogether. Remember, you have only seen him once, and that by gaslight and without paying much attention to him at the time. He doesn't get out much by day, and this has given him a veritable night-face. I do understand how you feel. But perhaps you will get used to him after all, dearest, for don't forget, even I, the writer of this letter, whom you have treated so well, have had to get used to him.

I have been exaggerating; your letter is as sweet as ever, but my moods go up and down, and today the bad one happens to be on top. Forgive us both, the writer of the letter and the subject of the photograph, and in our duality let us also benefit with kisses. Dearest, adieu, I am very calm, please be likewise, and go on loving me.

Yours, Franz

This really is the last twice-daily letter.

Oh God, another journey is in store for me.

December 6–7, 1912

[Presumably during the night of December 5 to 6, 1912]

Cry, dearest, cry, the time for crying has come! The hero of my story died a little while ago. To comfort you, I want you to know that he died peacefully enough and reconciled to all. The story itself is still not quite finished; I am not in the right mood just now, and am leaving the end until tomorrow. Moreover, it's very late; it took me so long to recover from yesterday's disturbance.[93] It's a pity that in some passages of the story my state of exhaustion and other

interruptions and extraneous worries are so apparent; I know it could have been done more neatly; this is particularly conspicuous in the more tender passages. That is the ever-gnawing realization: in more favorable circumstances, with the creative powers I feel within me, and quite apart from their strength and endurance, I could have achieved a neater, more telling, better-constructed piece of work than the one that now exists. This is a feeling which no amount of reasoning can dispel, though of course it is reason, too, that is right in saying that since there are no circumstances other than real ones, one cannot take any others into account, either. However that may be, I hope to finish the story tomorrow, and to return to the novel the following day.

My poor dear one, you want to know when your letters arrive, so as to plan accordingly? But the mail is quite unpredictable; in Austria in particular it functions in a completely haphazard fashion, just like the Telegraph game at summer parties. Your first express letter arrived at my apartment at 11 o'clock on Monday; the second arrived on Wednesday at the office between 9 and 10; your telegram arrived at 4:30 P.M. at the apartment (it would have been better had it arrived later, for it might have woken me up in time; as it was, I nearly overslept and didn't get there till 9 o'clock). The letter from the tram—the letter that my dearest Felice intended for me for Wednesday afternoon—didn't arrive at the apartment till Thursday; and when I got it, at 3 o'clock, I felt how close we were again, for you wanted me to have the telegram to take to my lecture, and I had very nearly put it in my pocket, but thought better of it, since I didn't just want it to stay in my pocket, but to spread it on the table before me; and for this purpose it really would have been too conspicuous, so I decided to take your picture postcard instead.

Evidently, I must have described my office very clearly indeed (perhaps because it isn't worth it), since you, dearest, completely misunderstand. We haven't got 70 departments; rather, in the department I am in there are 70 clerks. The head of this department has three assistants, and one of these, unfortunately the one who deals with the most important or rather the most unpleasant

matters, is myself. That's the way it is, and to make it even plainer, he who seems so strange in the picture but is more deeply devoted to you than any other, gives you a long, long kiss.

Yours, Franz

December 6, 1912

So once again, dearest, I have been a prize idiot to worry about my photograph. You must definitely have got used to it on your walk along the Elevated, or you wouldn't have thought about me so sweetly. But perhaps the headaches were all that remained of the first shock. Or it may have been the very long letter you wrote to me earlier on. Note: At best, I deserve frequent letters; I can't help it, but I feel really unworthy of long letters. I look around in all directions to see what I could do to deserve a letter as long as the one with the description of your trip, but can find nothing. There is no choice but to tremble and read it over and over again.

I still have misgivings about the letter in which I deplored my looks. Goodness, how you will laugh at me! And at any moment I am afraid I may get a telegram: "Franz, you are beautiful." Then all I could do would be to crawl under the table.

Just look, you fortunate girl, how in the enclosed newspaper clipping your story gets public and exaggerated praise, though it was only a privately organized event. Nor is the writer a man of no consequence; he is Paul Wiegler.[94] Do you know him? He has written a few good books, and has translated a few French ones even better. The most enviable thing about him is that he will be in Berlin in February, and I? On the other hand, he is going to Berlin as the Berlin *Morgenpost*'s theater critic, and that is not to be envied. We each have our troubles.

Oh, dearest, it is high time to stop and to kiss; otherwise my chief may come between us, and this must be avoided. Dearest, dearest! Just these two cries.

Yours, Franz

Yesterday was the last twice-daily letter; today is the very last.

———

I am just signing a letter to your traveling companion's husband, who called you little angel, you little angel.

———

I shall write at night about the photograph, which to me is extremely important and enlightening.

———

On Monday I am off to Leitmeritz. What did little Frl. Brühl have to say about my picture postcard? Did you get both my cards?
I've just remembered that your letter was written on the 4th, so how is it that it was Wednesday when—but how silly, I've made a mistake with the dates, I keep thinking you hadn't had my photograph at the time.

From December 6 to 7, 1912

Dearest, now listen, my little story is finished, but today's ending does not please me at all, it really could have been better, there is no doubt about this. The thought that immediately follows upon my distress is inevitably: I have still got you, dearest, a second justification for living, but then it is shameful to draw one's justification for living entirely from the existence of one's beloved.

I've remembered just in time that this is to be a Sunday letter, and that lamentations are best left for Monday. Dearest, I don't know why, but I was deeply moved by your walk along the Elevated. How derisive the laughter would be up on High if, at the same time perhaps, your lonely walks were to be compared with mine, and eyes were to wander from one to the other.

That photograph, dearest, brings me far, far closer to you again. I take it to be a fairly old picture. (You give no explanation of the picture, and may want to lead me into a trap; but happiness and gratitude make me bold, and I am not afraid.) The lighting, the position, and the mood of those in the picture make it all look most mysterious, and the key to the mystery is on the table in front, lying

beside its box, but this does not make the whole thing any clearer. You have a wistful smile, or it may be my fancy that invents this smile for you. I mustn't look at you too much, or I won't be able to take my eyes off you at all. You are wearing a strangely ornate blouse. There is some string or a bracelet on your left wrist. Apart from my personal opinion, in this case quite irrelevant, you are the center of this picture for other observers too; not only because of your position in the center, but because your mother has taken your arm, or at least it looks as though she has. That gives you some special significance. Moreover you are looking in quite another direction to the rest of the family. Of the others, your mother is closest to me (even at the risk of your mother not being in this picture at all). My impression of her is a little uncertain because the brightest and most diffused light falls on her face. Isn't she a big, rather bony woman? There are women vaguely like her in my father's family. She looks very understanding, I am almost back to my original opinion of her, I would not be afraid to talk to her. Your father looks very dignified; with him I would be less sure of myself. What actually is his business? I recognize your brother from the Binz[95] picture; I see nothing new in him. I assume those on the outside to be your sisters (guessing becomes easier because your brother is not married); I call the older one the "Woman from Budapest," and the gay-looking man at your side your Budapest brother-in-law. They are the only ones actually laughing, so they must belong together. The girl on the other side could be your phlegmatic sister, judging by her self-satisfied, rather sleepy smile. (If a girl of 20 is determined to read nothing, I don't think it matters; skimming is worse.) And which room are you in? Is it your present sitting room, and is that the table on which in one of your letters your father and brother were playing 66?[96] And who took the photograph? Is it some sort of family occasion? Your father and brother appear to be in dark suits, with white ties, but the so-called brother-in-law is wearing a colored one. Dearest, how powerful one is, face to face with a picture, and how powerless in reality! I can easily imagine your whole family stepping aside and removing themselves, leaving you on your own, while I lean across the big

table searching for your eyes, finding them, and dying of joy. Dearest, pictures are wonderful, pictures are indispensable, but they are torture as well.

With grave forebodings I have just looked at the time. 3:15! That is too bad. But I didn't start work until after midnight. Goodnight, dearest! And don't stop loving me! You will get my little book [*Meditation*] next week. I wonder how many kisses I shall get in exchange? An interesting speculation for dreams. Dearest, let this be my last word, dearest!

Yours, Franz

I mention this simply to check on the mail: today I got only the express letter with the photograph.

Night of December 6 to 7, 1912

[Presumably during the night of December 7 to 8, 1912]

Dearest, for various reasons I have not done any work today. There were a few letters to write, a petition for the office, the necessary preparations for that silly trip to Leitmeritz; moreover, I didn't go to sleep until after 7 P.M. and didn't wake until 11; and, finally, my trip to Leitmeritz, in spite of hurrying like the devil, will deprive me of one working night, and the recently resumed novel will have to be put aside again—in short, there are several reasons for not going on with it today. But by no means the least important reason is my exceptionally restless longing for you today. Are you really well? Are there too many things about me that you object to? Did I matter to you especially today? Dearest, today I must have dreamt about you the whole time I was asleep, but there are only two dreams I remember. In spite of fierce resistance, I tried to forget them as soon as I woke up, for there were frightening truths in them, more obtrusive and vivid than could ever come to the surface in the drab life of everyday. I will describe them to you quite superficially and briefly, though they were very involved and full of menacing details

which are still alive in me. The first was in some way connected with your remark about being able to send a telegram straight from the office. Well, I could somehow send a telegram straight from my room, the apparatus actually stood beside my bed, possibly in much the same position as the table you pull up to your bed. It was a particularly spiky apparatus and, just as I am afraid of making a telephone call, I was afraid of sending this telegram. But I had to send you a telegram on account of some immense worry about you, and a wild desire for immediate news of you that was about to drive me out of bed. Luckily my youngest sister was there at once, and started sending the telegram for me. My worries about you make me resourceful, alas, only in my dreams. The apparatus was built in such a way that one had only to press a button, and at once the reply from Berlin appeared on the paper tape. I remember how, rigid in suspense, I watched the tape unwind, at first completely blank, as was to be expected, since no reply could come through until you had been called to the apparatus in Berlin. What joy, when the first signs of writing appeared on the tape; I remember my joy was so tremendous I really should have fallen out of bed. Then came a proper letter that I could read perfectly, the greater part of which I might even be able to remember if I wanted to. All I will say is that the letter scolded me in the kindest, pleasantest way for my anxieties. I was called a “glutton” and there followed a list of the letters and postcards I have recently received or that are on their way.

In my second dream you were blind. A Berlin institute for the blind made a communal excursion to a village where my mother and I were spending our summer vacation. We were living in a little wooden house, the window of which I remember exactly. This little house stood on a slope in the middle of a large farmstead. To the left of the house stood a glass verandah where most of the blind girls were installed. I knew you were among them and my head was full of vague plans about how to arrange to meet and talk to you. Again and again I came out of our little house, crossed the plank that had been laid on the muddy ground outside the door, and each time I returned irresolutely, without having seen you. My mother

was also aimlessly wandering about; she was wearing a very simple dress, a kind of nun's habit, and held her arms against her chest, though not exactly crossed. She demanded certain services from the blind girls, and in this respect gave preference to a girl in a black dress, with a round face and one cheek deeply scarred as though it had once been torn to shreds. My mother commended this girl to me for her intelligence and willingness; I made a point of looking at her and nodding, but kept thinking only that she was one of your colleagues and would know where you could be found. Suddenly the comparative calm came to an end; perhaps there was a call for departure; in any case, the institute was to go on its way. But now my mind was made up; I ran down the slope through a little gate in a wall, because I thought I had seen that they would move off in that direction. When I got to the bottom, I came across a number of small blind boys in formation, with their teacher. I walked up and down behind them, because I thought that any moment now the whole institute would arrive, and that I should have no difficulty in finding you and talking to you. I certainly lingered there rather too long; I had also failed to find out about the procedure of departure, and wasted time watching a blind baby—all age groups were represented in that institute—being unswaddled and swaddled again on a stone pedestal. But finally I became suspicious of the silence that reigned around me, and asked the teacher why the rest of the institute hadn't arrived. Then I heard to my horror that only the little boys were to leave from here; all the others were departing at this very moment through the other exit at the top of the hill. To console me, he added—he called after me, for by then I was running like mad—that I might still arrive in time, since forming the blind girls into groups inevitably took a long time. So I ran up the now unusually steep and sunny path alongside a blank wall. Suddenly I was holding an enormous Austrian statute book that was very awkward to carry, but that would in some way help me to find you and talk to you properly. On my way I remembered that you were blind, in which case my appearance and outward demeanor luckily could not influence the impression I made on you. After considering this, I would have liked to throw away the statute book as an

unnecessary encumbrance. At last I reached the top, and in fact there was masses of time; the first couple had not even passed through the entrance gates. I placed myself in readiness, imagined you among the crowd of girls coming toward me, eyelids lowered, stiff and silent.

Then I woke up, all hot and distressed because you are so far away from me.

Sunday, December 7 [8], 1912

Oh dearest, though my piety lies in very different quarters, I feel like going down on my knees to thank God for your letter today. What is the cause of this recurring anxiety about you, this feeling of the utter pointlessness of being in rooms that you are not in, this infinite need of you! The only good thing about tomorrow's journey, for which I still have to prepare myself properly, is that I shall be several train-hours nearer to you. And then, if all goes well, I shall be back in Prague tomorrow afternoon, and race from the station to our porter. Letters, letters from you!

I am devising a most peculiar timetable for today. It is now 3 P.M. Last night I didn't get to bed till 4, but stayed there till 11:30. Once again your letter was responsible. At other times I have to stay in bed that long waiting for it to arrive, but today it came by special delivery (now that it has happened once, I might almost say Sunday letters should always be sent express); it arrived so early, too early to get up, so I lazed for hours on end in the afterglow of pleasure your letter gave me.

Well, now I am going for a walk, which in the true sense I haven't done for several days; I will then go to bed at 6, and if possible sleep till 1 or 2 at night. Perhaps I shall come to grips with my novel again, and then write comfortably until 5 in the morning; no later, because my train leaves at 5:45.

Dearest, please take care of yourself. Up again till 3. The main purpose of the Hanukkah[97] festival cannot possibly be to tire you out. So you are a speaker? Well, well! Haven't I said it before? Will

the prologue refer to Ruth as well? The cabin I inhabited in my last sanatorium[98] was called “Ruth.” My 3 weeks’ stay in a cabin with “Ruth” over the door has established certain connections for me with that name, and I should like to know that it has been publicly pronounced and praised by you.—One more thing, I don’t go courting; if I did, I shouldn’t have to envy any painter (who, I must say, in his self-portrait looks like a criminal ape), but could let the whole world envy me.[99]

Franz

> Dearest, you do rely heavily on our being of one mind (and with justification it seems), if in your letter due to arrive here on Sunday you rebuke me for not sending by express mail the letter due to reach you on Sunday. But it was only sweet drowsiness, and thus for the distant one an especially obvious sign of your pulsating life.

December 7 [8], 1912

Dearest, only a hurried greeting, and a plea to let me complain a little and cry on your shoulder. Owing to a number of mishaps I did not get home until 7:30; there is no question of sleeping now, at least of going to sleep, for the family noise is about to start; I also have some work to do on my court case, the long petition has yet to be written; in short, once again the night will have to be sacrificed to the voracious world, and you alone, dearest, remain my great consolation. I am tired, weak; my head whirls, and so I ask you—it is immensely arrogant, I know—to kiss me, here, at the end of this sad letter, dearest! Dearest! Well, the day is over; for what’s to come is not worth mentioning.

Franz

[PUBLICITY POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Leitmeritz, December 9, 1912]

Do you[100] know his[101] story *Alone*? I was overwhelmed by it once, a long time ago. Apart from that I really know only a few passages from *The Gothic Room*, and I must say I am very fond of them, though possibly for certain special reasons. Best wishes.

F. Kafka

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Leitmeritz, December 9, 1912]

About to leave for home, thank God, where the most important mail is waiting for me, undealt with, unopened. Best wishes

FK

December 9–10, 1912

My dearest, the extent to which these cursed interruptions harm my work is very depressing. Yesterday I took great pains to stop myself working, then the journey interfered, and today my writing was very mediocre, though fortunately I have not written much. No, best not to talk about it!

The one thing that reconciles me to the journey is the fact that it was quite pointless for the Institute as well; on the other hand that, too, is disappointing. In the end the whole trip shrank to a family visit—I have relatives[102] in Leitmeritz—because, owing to an error of the court clerk, the case in which I was to represent the Institute was postponed indefinitely 3 days ago without our Institute having been informed. From this point of view the whole trip takes on a special significance: off I march while it's still almost night, wander through the streets in the piercing cold—past the breakfast room at the "Blaue Stern," its lights already on but curtains still drawn, though now again there's an eager customer looking in, there's no one to look out onto the street—then off on this night journey by train among a lot of sleeping people who, though asleep, retain enough misguided energy to rouse themselves to change the heating (which I keep turning to cold) back to hot, and thus to overheat an

already overheated compartment. Finally I ride for half an hour in a coach through foggy avenues, snow-sprinkled fields and pastures—all the time uneasy, all the time uneasy, if for no other reason than the apathy with which I contemplate all I see. At last at 8 in the morning I stand outside my relatives' shop on Lange Gasse in Leitmeritz, and in my uncle's (actually my step-uncle's, if there is such a thing) office—which I have known ever since I was a child—enjoying the freshness and undeserved superiority felt by travelers when confronting someone who has only just crept out of bed and, still in his felt slippers, is trying unsuccessfully to keep warm in his cold, unopened shop. Then my aunt arrived (to be precise, my real uncle's widow who, after his death many years ago, had married the manager, the said step-uncle), now an ailing but still very lively, small, round, noisy, hand-rubbing, but to me always agreeable person.

But now I must let them clamor on, for it's striking 3 A.M. next door, and the child needs sleep. Dearest, there is so much to say about your last letter! Please don't look upon me as some kind of prodigy; for our love's sake, don't do it. For it would look as though you wished to push me away from yourself. Insofar as I have to rely upon myself, and as long as you are nowhere near me, I am basically a very feeble and unhappy man; the things that are unusual about me are largely bad and sad, and consist mainly—as you rightly suspected at the beginning of your letter, without thinking it through to its conclusion—of the fact that, although able to go on a pointless trip to Leitmeritz, I am unable to come to Berlin with the most definite objective. Dearest, draw me as close to you as this unfortunate peculiarity of mine permits. And don't talk about the greatness hidden in me, or do you think there is something great about spending a two-day interruption of my writing in permanent fear of never being able to write again, a fear, by the way, that this evening has proved to be not altogether unfounded? And on that evening, was my handling of that cardboard box anything but flirtatiousness, timidity, and probably social embarrassment in which I took a certain pleasure? I am sure you were aware of it at

the time, if only unconsciously, but your memory is becoming blurred, and it shouldn't. And I am inclined to think that it is all due to that silly photograph, which I hesitated to send for so long, which on the one hand has done me harm, and on the other has not helped me yet, because I still haven't got your latest photograph, though it should have been ready long ago. Dearest, please hold me close—close, close, as close as I long to press myself to you, as I felt on the whole of my trip, on the train, in the coach, with my relatives, in court, in the streets, and in the fields. In my imagination I pushed my neighbor in the compartment off his seat, and put you in his place, then each of us sat quietly looking at each other from our corners.

What is this about you not looking well, Felice? What does your mother expect of you? (*This you must answer at once, and in detail!*) What does she think it is due to? What changes does she want to make? And what in your opinion is the cause? And have you made it up with your mother? In your last letter you strike me as nervous. And though you seemed nervous, I am obtuse enough to have given you unnecessary advice on the preceding pages. But now I am talking myself into a state of nerves. Dearest, there is nothing seriously wrong with you, is there? Please answer all these questions in great detail. All the rest on all previous pages is unimportant; disregard it, answer only this! What would become of me if you were to fall ill! Dearest, I have to know all about it, it is my most important concern. Once again: I am not anxious yet, but shall become so if you don't answer in detail. For you are my dearest, after all.

Franz

December 10, 1912

I am writing to you now, long past office hours, not so that you should have a letter from me by 10 o'clock, because you don't want me to write either if I haven't the time, but I am writing to you simply for my own sake, so that tomorrow at 10 I can feel I have

been for a moment in your dear, auspicious presence. Dearest, what surprised me most was not the blindness in both our dreams, but the real sorrow you seem to have had on Sunday, at a time when I was particularly worried about you, although it was not actually caused by your Sunday letter.

What exactly happened at your house on Sunday? Your Sunday evening letter is full of riddles. And in the previous letter you say you don't wish to have any secrets from me, yet now you make a secret even of your troubles, to which above all else I feel I have some special claim (not of course to your troubles, though unfortunately I often act as if I had). Tell me about it, dearest, in a few words. You know from my Sunday letter that I suffer with you, even if I don't know that you are suffering, but to suffer with someone, without knowing the cause, is twice as bad. Since 10 o'clock I have been no longer worried, because your Monday letter, so full of love and kindness, almost energetic, has made me regain my balance. (I had just read a few pages of the letter when a carpenter arrived with an application for insuring his business; I hurriedly agreed to everything he asked, for which I shall never be able to answer to anyone but God.) But I must have some explanations about Sunday. Why didn't you go for a walk at all that day? And why were you so tired on Sunday evening, and expecting Monday, a working day, to make you feel better? I could tell by your Sunday morning letter that something was wrong. But what? What? A blind man must feel like this when something in which he is deeply involved is going on around him, but he can hear only indistinct noises, cannot get any closer, and no one offers him any explanation. After your second letter today I ceased to worry, but if only for possible future occasions I should like to know what sort of troubles and tribulations are threatening you.

A lingering kiss for the melancholy lips of the girl in the last photograph, and a pursing of the lips for the Negro girl soon to come.

Franz

Night of December 10 to 11, 1912

Now at last the whole of the dear girl has arrived! And not in the least like a Negro, but just as she is in one's mind and heart. And not in the least sad or ill-looking—gayer, almost, than anyone else. But unfortunately held so tightly on either side that it would take immense strength to pry her loose. And unfortunately so close to her partner that should one want to kiss her, one would have to kiss Herr Rosenbaum (actually, it seems to be someone else) as well.

It is strange that in this photograph taken at night, everyone—when seen in daylight—looks bleary-eyed and distorted, whereas now, by the light of my electric table-lamp, it all takes on such an awe-inspiring appearance that I could not possibly imagine myself in such company. As for a tailcoat, when was it I last wore one! It must have been two years ago, at my sister's wedding. And this now most ancient of coats dates back to the time when I received my degree, which makes it 6 years old, but it is still not too tight across the chest. What an immaculate tailcoat your partner has, how well he wears it, and what a dashing vest!

What is that locket you are wearing, what is the ring? (Your remark about looking like a Negro girl makes me think there must be another photograph. Am I right, dear careless one?) The woman next to you must be the wife of one of the directors, and the hand between the two of you must be hers? But where is your other hand, and why do both your neighbors press so close to you? The top of your skirt is edged with lace, isn't it?

Never could you explain this picture to me in too much detail. Which of all these people are in your office? I think I can recognize Frl. Brühl; she must be the one in that peculiar but perhaps beautiful black dress with the remarkable inset across the chest. The only really unhappy person is the man obliquely behind you at the pillar. He is wearing a black necktie and looks as though he had to work and care for everyone. Which is Director Strauss, and which the chief clerk Salomon? Which is the girl you danced with? Where is Frl. Grossmann? And the gentleman who wrote the poem?

In last night's letter I asked for the photograph, and today it is here. But dearest, we cannot be content with that. We shall have to arrange things in such a way that the very moment one of us wants something from the other, the mailman arrives at once, at no matter what hour of the day or night. By the way, the mail is trying to make it up with us. Today the mailman brought the first bound copy of my little book [*Meditation*] (I'm sending it to you tomorrow), and as a token of solidarity he stuck the tube with your photograph into the string around the book. But here again, I go on wishing for the unattainable.

Franz

*Enclosed with* Meditation:

[December 11, 1912]

Listen, I am not writing again today, because I got to bed only for a moment this afternoon, and my head keeps buzzing at the top on the left, as a reminder. Wrote nothing Saturday, Sunday; Monday not much and that mediocre; Tuesday nothing, a fine ending to the week! A fine beginning!

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Please be kind to my poor book! It consists of the very pages you saw me putting in order that evening. At the time you were not "considered worthy" to inspect them, you dear, crazy, vindictive one! Now it belongs to you exclusively; only jealousy could make me snatch it from your hand, so as to be the only one to be held by you and not to have to share my place with an unimportant old book. I wonder if you notice how the various pieces differ in age. One of them for example is certainly 8 to 10 years old. Show the book to as few people as possible, so as to avoid having your mind about me changed.

Goodnight, dearest, goodnight.

Night of December 11 to 12, 1912

Dearest, I am in a strange state, and have to accept it. Today I felt rested, had slept fairly well from 1 A.M. until the morning, had managed to sleep in the afternoon as well, then sat down to my writing. I write a little, neither well nor badly, then stop, although I feel in the right frame of mind and think I have the vigor and capacity for writing. I sit in my dressing gown in my armchair for a whole hour doing nothing, just as I'm sitting now in my freezing cold room, with a blanket around my legs. Why, you may ask, and I am asking too. And thus, if you agree, here we stand, arm in arm, facing me, looking at me, and not understanding me. Anyway I was in complete discord with myself today, owing to having done no writing for so long, and did not write to you this afternoon partly for lack of time, but also because you will get my book at 10 o'clock, and also because the calm exchange of one letter a day would be best for both of us—but above all because of my terrible general disinclination and lassitude—due to not writing—and because I said to myself that it shouldn't be necessary to pour out in one long stream every momentary unhappiness, you much-tormented girl. But now, this evening, I had the chance to write, which my whole nature has been irrefutably demanding—if not directly, then with an inward-spreading despair; but I write barely enough to let me survive another day, and remain lazily sitting back, in comfortable lassitude, as though slowly bleeding to death. How gloomily I should have gone to bed if it weren't for you, dearest, to whom I can direct my feeble words, and from whom I shall get them back ten times as strong. However, from now on I shall not leave my work for a single evening, and from tomorrow will immerse myself more deeply.

Never fail to tell me, dearest, where you are, what you are wearing, what it is like around you, while you are writing to me. Your letter from the tram makes me feel almost insanely close to you. How do you manage to write in a tram? With the paper on your knees, your head bent that far down while writing? Trams go slowly in Berlin, don't they? In a long line, one behind the other, is

that right? And you walk to the office in the morning? In which mailbox do you mail the letter?

By the way, in this letter you describe Sunday as a quiet day. How does this agree with your earlier remarks? The lavish food! Asparagus in November! What does it mean, spending your time binding books instead of going for a walk? And binding? How? Oh dearest, with such questions I want to grab hold of you. But what else can I do?

[SQUEEZED INTO THE CORNER, AS THERE IS NO ROOM LEFT ON THE PAGE] Kisses in the corner! Franz

December 12, 1912

Dearest, you shouldn't do it! Promise me a second letter, and not keep the promise. I know you are busy, and I don't ask for two letters, but you must see that if you promise as definitely as you did this morning and then the letter doesn't arrive, I can't fail to worry. How could it be otherwise? When I suspect some uncertainty in you, then I too begin to feel uncertain, and become more useless than ever. It's not really too bad today. Your midday letter was kind and soothing, and as long as you are reading *At Sunrise*[103] you are well protected on one side at least. But if the promised letter doesn't arrive, all this is not enough for me.

Thank you for Herzog's article.[104] I have read a number of his things; his manner of writing is pretty weak and awkwardly forced, and so dry that he keeps making unsuccessful attempts (in every sentence) to put some life into it. I am too tired to explain this more clearly. Here as elsewhere, his fundamental opinions are very laudable and honestly experienced. The uncertainty of his writing, the incoherence of his thought, which he tries to conquer; his undoubtedly strong temperament, which fails to extend to his writing, give his essays greater individuality than many works by far better writers. If he meant to recommend good books, then he was right in what he said in this article; if he meant to give a definition of "modern," then he wasn't altogether wrong, considering that his

conclusions rest on nothing but platitudes. The only thing that is impressive is his comprehensive analysis of Werfel, the culminating point of his article. You know, Felice, Werfel is really miraculous; when I read his book *The Friend of the World*[105] for the first time (I had heard him recite poetry before that), I thought I was going off my head with enthusiasm. The man has tremendous ability. What's more, he has already got his reward; he lives in Leipzig in blissful conditions, he is a reader for Rowohlt (who also published my little book [*Meditation*]), and at the age of 24 has complete freedom to live and write. Imagine what he will produce! I have no idea how to end, since this strange young man has come between us.

Franz

[December 12 to 13, 1912]

Ah dearest, how lucky I am that now—having barely managed to get through a passage in the novel, a passage with which I don't feel quite at home (the novel still won't obey me, I hold on to it, but it resists me unawares, and I keep having to let it go for whole passages on end)—I am allowed to write to you, who are so very much kinder to me than my novel.

If only you wouldn't keep slaving away, keep going to bed so late—after all, what can I do with a dead-tired sweetheart? Just take me as an example, dearest: I am at home night after night, and even if I used to be a gadabout, as you call it (particularly during the year I worked for a private insurance company), I was certainly never an enthusiastic one, rather a sad one who by means of sleepiness and unequivocable remorse hoped to take the edge off the inevitable misery of the following day. But all that was long ago.

How tired you must have been the night before last when you asked me whether I am still in need of something to complete my knowledge of your past. But dearest, I still don't know anything about it. How you underestimate my eagerness to know everything about you! If your letters are merely a comfort to me, like someone stroking one's forehead, and if I am meanwhile so very conscious of

the passing of the days and nights in your life in which I have no share, how much more am I bound to miss not knowing about your past, about the thousands of days when there were no letters! For example your vacations, the most important times of the year during which one begins and ends a small separate and concentrated life; I know vaguely of only two, the trip to Prague and the stay at Binz. I think you once wrote that you spent three vacations in Berlin, but how about the others? If I am to share every detail of your trip next summer—tonight in my dullness and heaviness I can hardly believe it possible—surely I ought to know how the past trips went off: whether you aren't very spoiled, and whether I, by comparison, wouldn't make too poor and unworthy a traveling companion for you. Goodnight, dearest, and a more peaceful life!

Franz

Night of December 13 to 14, 1912

Dearest, for some days now your young man has again been so tired and unhappy that he is not fit company. These are the times when he could well use—more urgently than ever—a kind, resolute, lively human being at his side. Or perhaps this is just the time when he should not abuse the company of such a being, when it might even be best for him to drowse all alone. After all, my novel is progressing, though slowly; the only thing is that it looks terrifyingly like me.—Before we met I also had these unpredictable moods; but then I seemed to lose all contact with the world; my life seemed disrupted; I rose to the surface and dived to the depths; now I have you, my dearest, I feel myself benevolently supported, and when I collapse I know it will not be forever, at least I think I know it, and can console you and myself with thoughts of better things to come. Dearest, don't be angry with me for this Sunday morning greeting!

So I didn't distinguish myself with my interpretation of the picture. True (from the snapshot in your album), I took the girl you

danced with to be Frl. Brühl. But I think in my letter I quite fortuitously mentioned the girl below the telegram as well, or intended to. So that is your little friend! I liked the look of her at once. In the picture the shape of her nose looks very French. She has gay eyes. Compared to her, Frl. Grossmann looks rather homespun. But they both have the advantage of a relationship with you, and I have no fault to find with either of them, other than that they see you every day, and I never.

Apart from your dance, what other performances were there that evening? Weren't you in a play as well? And that young man is already a director? And the older one only a chief clerk? Since I took the director to be much older, I shall now have to go over in my mind everything you said about that evening, so as to correct, in all important respects, this gentleman's age and appearance.

I am so happy to think that my book [*Meditation*], no matter how much I find fault with it (only its brevity is perfect), is now in your possession. Frl. Brühl is right, monograms can be most beautifully interpreted. It is also true, as you may remember, that I wrote the monogram[106] in your presence, under your very eyes, whereas I could easily have spelled out Max Brod in full, for neither his name nor the friendship and love that unite us need be a secret; and finally it is true that B is also the initial of Bauer. But here I go, rambling miserably on. I am in urgent need of having my lips sealed with kisses.

Yours, Franz

From December 14 to 15, 1912

Dearest, I am too tired today, and also too dissatisfied with my work (had I the strength to carry out my innermost intentions, I would pick up all I have written of my novel and throw it out of the window) to write more than a few lines; but write to you I must, and the last words written before going to sleep must be written to you, to make everything at the last moment, awake or asleep, take on a true meaning, such as it never could through my writing.

Goodnight, poor tormented darling. There is a curse on my letters that even the kindest hands cannot dispel. Though the immediate torments they inflicted on you may be over, they rise again to plague you in some new and terrible way. Poor, dear, everlastingly tired child! A joking answer to a joking question: I do not, dearest girl, like you at all. This gale that's howling outside! And here I sit awkwardly with paper before me, incapable of believing that at some time you will be holding this letter in your hands, and the feeling of the great distance between us settles on my chest. Don't cry, dearest! How does the serene girl I saw that evening, how does she manage to cry? And how can I possibly let her cry without being near her! But you have no reason for tears, dearest! Wait, tomorrow I will and must have the most marvelous, most consoling, most brilliant ideas as to what to do because of the letters your mother may have read. So if my hand—endowed with love, hence with magic, and now raised in the direction of Berlin—means anything: be calm, at least on Sunday! Have I achieved anything? Shall I have to go to bed in the end, as unsuccessful with you as with my novel? If so, then I'd rather be damned, and with the swiftness of the gale that's blowing outside. But no, you might even be dancing today, and exhausting yourself again. I don't blame you, dearest, I only want to help you, but am at a loss about what to say. Of course, true advisers don't really look like me. Goodnight! I see that in my exhaustion I repeat myself over and over again; I do it for my own pleasure, to ease my heart, and fail to consider that overtired, tearful eyes, red from distant kisses, will have to read it.

Sunday [December 15, 1912]

Dearest, no time and no peace for me, so none for you either—and just when there is so much to tell you about your last four letters, yesterday's and today's (imagine, your letter from the tram, dated the nth, didn't arrive till yesterday, that is, the day after the letter of the 12th, in which you explained the photograph), and so many questions to answer. And how necessary your letters are to me just now, for I feel so very dull and stupid. When your express letter was brought to me this morning and I woke up, I felt as though I

had been lying in wait all night for this particular way of being woken. And in bed, with your photograph, what a lovely way to spend one's time! Unhappiness could not touch me; it had to wait at my bedside; as long as I stayed in bed, I was completely protected.

It certainly is the most alive picture I have of you. Bless the young Volunteer! One hand on your hip, the other on your temple, that is life! And since that is the life to which I belong, it can never be exhausted by scrutiny. Is that your room? Or isn't it? There is something to be said for both. The little table seems to be where yours is, then the bed would be opposite. But I am mystified by the densely covered walls; you never mentioned them when describing your room. And why should you have hung beer mugs on that immensely high wall? And why, in the foreground, should there be a gentleman's walking stick, the handle of which is visible? So perhaps it is your visitor's study, after all. You hold yourself magnificently; I call you by name, but you don't turn toward me, though I expected you to. I look for you in all the pictures on the wall (except the one with the man in a beret), and so far have found you in three. If I am right, confirm it; if my eyes deceive me, let me believe it. How supple you look! If only I had seen you dance! Have you always done gymnastics?

Your express letter today is calm, but dare I trust this calm? I have read it more or less from all angles to see whether I could discover anything suspicious. But how can one suddenly acquire vigor and liveliness after sorrow and fatigue? For my sake, so as not to worry me? No, dearest, you cannot be in such poor shape that you would want to conceal it from me. I am here to be told everything, one has to dissemble only with one's parents, and if I am not here to be told everything, then I don't deserve to be here at all.

Dearest, the business about the letters seems bad, for the moment irreparable; one feels one will never get rid of the lump in one's throat. It was just the same with me, though of course with me it had far fewer immediate consequences. Well, there may be mothers who don't read their children's correspondence even if they have the opportunity, but I am afraid neither your mother nor mine is one of them. So, to simplify our thinking and our worries, let us assume

she has read the letters, and perhaps not only she, but also your sister whose answers on the telephone, at least according to your description, sound suspiciously short. That's why I think—since your mother seldom comes into your room—that your sister must have found the letters, and then called your mother. Whereupon they both began reading until they were interrupted by your telephone call. Who answered the telephone? And who usually answers it? Was it all the letters, or only some of them, and which ones? I can't at this moment (considering my present state of mind, I should undoubtedly be in bed, and in this state I certainly would not dare write to anyone but you, but aren't you entitled to all my states, the worst as well as the best?), at this moment I can't imagine the impression these letters, above all in my illegible hand, could have made on your mother and sister, the more so since they surely know, and probably found proof in the letters, that we have spent hardly more than one hour of our lives—and this in the most formal fashion—in each other's company. How they can find any connection, at least a conventional one, between this fact and the letters, is something I cannot even guess at without further evidence. The most obvious, innocent, therefore not quite credible assumption would be that they consider me all but insane, that you have been infected by me, and therefore are doubly in need of rest, in which case—and this would not be a disastrous consequence of my letters—you would have to be treated very gently, though that too, within a family, can include the crudest humiliations. Whatever the case may be, we shall have to wait; also the balance between us is still not perfect, for I haven't yet had a letter from your mother. Poor darling, wedged between an inconsiderate tormentor and a watchful family! Should your mother want to say anything more drastic, the handing over of my Sunday letter would have been the first opportunity, and I shall hear about it tomorrow.

Now I am going to stop, not to go to sleep, it's too late for that; also, I won't be doing anything this evening. I am just going to run to the station to mail the letter; but then I absolutely must go to the Brods'. Frau Sophie [Friedmann] arrived suddenly this morning (Max's engagement is to be celebrated in the evening); I have

already had a few words with her, but as it happened, I was only leading up to what I wanted to say and I am afraid in my present state I won't achieve much more. When her arrival was announced I almost felt a breath of your presence and the most intense expectation. And that may be as far as I shall get.

Franz

Night of December 15 to 16, 1912

Well dearest, the doors are shut, all is quiet, I am with you once more. How many things does "to be with you" mean by now? I have not slept all day, and while I duly went about all the afternoon and early evening with a heavy head and a befogged brain, now, as night sets in, I am almost excited, feel within me a tremendous desire to write; the demon inhabiting the writing urge begins to stir at most inopportune moments. Let him, I'll go to bed. But if I could spend Christmas writing and sleeping, dearest, that would be wonderful!

I was after you continuously this afternoon, in vain of course. As a matter of fact not quite in vain, for I constantly kept as close as possible to Frau Friedmann, because after all she was close to you for quite a time, because you say *Du* to each other, and because she happens to be the possessor of letters from you, which I certainly begrudge her. But why doesn't she say a word about you, while I keep staring at her lips, ready to pounce on the first word. Have you stopped writing to each other? Perhaps she knows nothing new about you? But how is this possible! And if she knows nothing new, why doesn't she talk about something old? And if she doesn't want to talk about you, why doesn't she at least mention your name, as she used to, when she was around before? But no, she won't; instead, she keeps me hanging about, and we talk about incredibly unimportant things, such as Breslau, coughing, music, scarves, brooches, hairstyles, Italian holidays, sleigh-rides, beaded bags, stiff shirts, cufflinks, Herbert Schottländer,[107] the French language, public baths, showers, cooks, Harden,[108] economic conditions,

traveling by night, the Palace Hotel, Schreiberhau,[109] hats, the University of Breslau, relatives—in short about everything under the sun, but the only subject that has, unfortunately, some faint association with you consists of a few words about Pyramidon and aspirin; it is cause for wonder why I pursue this subject for so long, and why I enjoy rolling these two words around my tongue. But really, I am not satisfied with this as the sole outcome of an afternoon, because for hours on end my head hums with the desire to hear the name Felice. Finally, by force, I direct the conversation to the railway connections between Berlin and Breslau, at the same time giving her a menacing look—nothing.

I must admit that apart from this I was also rather nervous about Max's engagement. After all, he is being disengaged from me. Of course I have known his fiancée for years, and have almost always liked her, even liked her very much at times, and she has many virtues (for the account of which this paper will by no means suffice, especially if I cover it with such clichés), and on the whole she has a gentle, tender, cautious nature, is deeply devoted to him—and yet, and yet. Farewell, dearest, I wish you and I were alone in the world.

Franz

December 16, 1912

No letter, dearest, not at 8, not at 10. You were tired from dancing, and from the party in the afternoon. But I didn't even get a postcard. Well, no cause for complaint; I got two letters, both yesterday and the day before, and who would decide between two such exquisite possibilities in such a way as to say: I would rather get one letter each day from my beloved than two one day and none the next—but it is precisely the regularity that gladdens the heart, the selfsame hour each day when the daily letter should arrive, this hour that brings a feeling of calm, trust, ease, and the absence of unpleasant surprises. Dearest, I really don't think anything bad has happened to you—in that case you would have had to write all the

more urgently—but how, alone at my desk, in the presence of my typist, of clients wholly preoccupied with themselves, of clerks with lots of questions, how could I, confronted by all these people, arrive at the definite conclusion that in faraway Berlin you are living a more or less calm and contented life? Perhaps your mother tormented you yesterday, perhaps you have a head- or toothache, perhaps you are overtired, and of all this I know nothing, but the uncertainty keeps going around and around in my head.

Farewell, dearest; from now on I shall write only once a day, at least until I make more progress with my work. For until that happens, my letters make too gloomy a showing, and one a day, though you may not admit it even to yourself, will be more than enough for you.

Farewell, dearest. How this word suddenly throws sunlight on the paper! Nothing can be wrong with you, and I am calm.

Yours, Franz

From December 16 to 17, 1912

Dearest, it is 3.30 A.M. I have spent too much and yet too little time on my novel; and now I am almost reluctant to return to you, for my fingers are still downright dirty from a repulsive scene that came pouring out of me with exceptional ease (excessive, alas, for the description of the scene).—Dearest, no news from you today makes me feel as though there were two eight-hour railway journeys between us. Could something embarrassing have happened when my Sunday letter was handed over? Well, I shall certainly know tomorrow; without this reassuring thought I would prefer to walk up and down my room all night instead of going to bed.—Goodnight now, my dearest girl, be true to me, provided it doesn't do you too much harm, and understand that I belong to you as much as any object in your room.

Yours, Franz

Night of December 17 to 18, 1912

My dearest girl, all the writing I did today on my novel was nothing but a suppressed desire to write to you, and now I have been punished on both sides; what I wrote is pretty poor (so as not to keep complaining: yesterday I had a good night; I could and should have prolonged it indefinitely), and toward you, dearest, it has made me disgruntled and altogether unworthy.

If only I could spend a short while in your nice office, where everything seems pleasant! If only I could take the place of one of your little girls for a day, these girls who are free to come up to you whenever they like, kiss you, and put their arms around you. (I wonder why they kissed you when the book arrived, and why they were particularly excited when they kissed you? It could only have been out of instinctive compassion, as deep as it was sincere, that their great friend and a man like me—no more, I am only hurting your feelings, and mine). But what I really need, dearest, is your presence! If only I could be in your office! When I stand by my depressing office desk—it must be several times larger than yours; it has to be that big, or it would never accommodate all the mess—and think that after all it might not be altogether impossible for us to be in the same office, I feel like turning over the desks, breaking the glass in the cupboard doors, insulting my chief; but since I haven't really the strength to carry out these sudden impulses, I do nothing of the kind; I stand there as before, holding a document I am supposed to be reading, but in fact I stare sleepily beyond it toward the door that should open to allow the carrier of your letter to enter. Do look around your office (*which, incidentally, you have not described to me yet*) to see whether perhaps in some little corner there may not be a spare place for me. Tell me exactly where it is, and I shall occupy it every single day, if not in fact, nevertheless without fail, and, if you like, I will allot a place in my office to you (there is no more suitable place than the one right next to me) and then we shall sit, if not in one and the same office, at least together in two offices. You moreover will have the immense advantage on evenings when you are alone in the office writing to me, of having

me to keep off and chase away all the mice from around your desk; while I, on the other hand, will suffer on those evenings from the disadvantage of not having the sense to allow you to finish writing your letters to me; instead, I shall come up to you, take the hand that is trying to write, hold it, and refuse to let it go.

Your little girls behave in a charming, touching way; but this does not surprise me; it is what I expect of them. I can never hear enough about your office. Offices with a lot of girls must be very different from those with men. My typist for example would never meet me at my tailor's with a rose (you can't imagine how funny this thought is without having seen the man whom, as a matter of fact, I like very much), but then he can do other things instead. Once, for instance, in the presence of reliable witnesses, he ate 76 of our penny rolls at one sitting, and on another occasion 25 hard-boiled eggs—feats he would repeat with pleasure any day he had the chance. In particular he extols the pleasant feeling of warmth he claims one has after eating 25 hard-boiled eggs.

But for heaven's sake, what am I doing with the few moments I have with you on paper! Of course I did you an injustice in yesterday's letter, dearest, kindest girl! (What else am I good for, except to do you injustice?) On Sunday you were tired (you didn't do any cooking, despite last week's promise to your mother) and also—as I felt in my own head—you still had a headache on Monday (and a sore throat as well? Shame! Shame! Yours and mine! The beloved of a believer in natural therapy has a sore throat!). And yet in spite of all this, you wrote to me on Sunday, but apparently the letter and postcard, by some still inexplicable delivery, didn't reach the office until Monday evening. In any case, I found the letter and postcard first thing on Tuesday, downstairs with the porter. Oh, what joy! I fairly danced up those stairs!

Something important is missing from your letters, dearest! There isn't a word about your mother, and nothing about the theories on the letter incident in my Sunday letter. Is this a good, is it a bad sign? I haven't got the postcard from the party on me, I left it in my office coat, but isn't there a signature on it, Tony Bauer,[110] and didn't she add greetings to her name? Is that your sister? And who

are the others? I can well believe that none of your dancing partners could be compared to me as far as dancing goes. There are probably various reasons for my inability to dance. Perhaps I should have practiced more on my own; when dancing with girls I was always both too shy and too absentminded. I remember a young, undoubtedly very energetic fellow in our dancing class who always practiced his steps alone in a corner, while couples danced all around him. I don't know if he really learned to dance in this way, but I do know that I often used to glance at him, envying him his determination and independence.

Sophie F[riedmann] has left again, they are taking a holiday, and have gone to the Semmering,[111] I think. I am delighted that you haven't written to her for such a long time. However, as I told you before, she has abundantly avenged that delight.—That's all, and now alone again.

Franz

From December 18 to 19, 1912

Dearest, 2:30, spent the afternoon with Max looking at furnishings for his apartment, the evening with my family, the early part of the night in cursory work; now with your letter, dearest girl, somewhat late, my real day begins.

So that's supposed to be the sad little typist from Weissensee?[112] But she seems bright and jolly, and the angle of her right knee puts almost the entire rather stiff row of horribly Christian-looking girls in marching position. Are any of your friends among them? Say so, and at once they will be dear to me; even the tall, frightening one, dressed in black, will be dear and close to me. What a searching look you give me from that picture! The way your right-hand neighbor holds you tight around the waist, as though she knew perfectly well whom she is holding. You are carrying a book, what is it? You must have led a real country life at Weissensee. The shrubs, the fence, the glass door in the background don't look very officelike. I would so much like to know something about you from

the days when you were happy enough to suffer only from the office. What was your supervisor like? I can't see you running after her to her dressmaker with a rose when she was cross. And what about the row with the secretary in your present position? How was it settled?

For the time being, dearest, I am not going to send you a photograph. The next one will be the good picture I wrote to you about, without having ordered it yet, because it is rather difficult for me to get to the photographer; but I will do so within the next few days. I don't have any very recent pictures, and have no group photograph in my possession; besides, I wasn't very fond of the groups of which I formed a part (life for a girl among girls is more pleasant and affectionate than for a man among men), and I don't want to send the other pictures for the time being, because I am afraid that through no fault of my own, and quite unjustly, I look rather peculiar in all of them. But as for telling you things, there is of course a great deal more; on Sundays let us plunge into bygone days.

But dearest, here I go on writing quite happily, and you may be ill? In your letter after reading *Schilling's Flight* you even mention the possibility of influenza. For heaven's sake, dearest, you to whom my life is devoted, take care of yourself! I must admit, when I think of you being ill, my first thought is not of your suffering, but of the possibility of not hearing from you, and then, driven by despair, of hitting out at all and sundry. On Tuesday the sore throat had turned into sniffles; this, I take it, is an improvement in these—to me completely unknown—colds. But are you still in the grip of those headaches? I can see you after sealing your last letter, getting out your aspirin and swallowing. I shudder.

Well, today I went to the Brods'; I would have gone anyway, but after your second letter this morning I had a particular reason for hurrying because—this is crazy, no doubt—I wanted to catch the postcard you had written to Sophie F[riedmann], for I can never see enough of what you have written. I was quite wild with joy at the prospect of holding for a few moments this postcard addressed to someone else, of reading it slowly and being able to say to myself:

“This is from my dearest girl.” It all went off very well; I had posed my questions inconspicuously and driven them all carefully toward the crucial reply, only to hear in the end that Director Brod had forwarded to Vienna Sophie’s mail, including your postcard, about half an hour earlier. It was all I could do not to bang the table.

On account of the gale outside—a moment ago, owing to the general vibration, the badly fitting front door opened of its own accord—I must have failed to hear the clock outside—I don’t even know which one, it can only be heard at night—for it is now 3:30. Farewell, my dearest. No, I didn’t imagine my being alone with you the way you do. If I want the impossible, I want it in its entirety. Entirely alone, dearest, I wanted us to be entirely alone on this earth, entirely alone under the sky, and to lead my life, my life that is yours, without distraction and with complete concentration, in you.

Franz

From December 19 to 20, 1912

Well, my dearest girl, it is evening again after a sleepless afternoon (sleepless afternoon sounds worse than sleepless night); there won’t be any more writing, only to this girl to whom one always wants to write, from whom one always wants to hear, with whom one always longs to be, in whom one longs to lose oneself.

But I beg you, dearest one, tell me straight for once, how can it be? You, who wrote that you are never ill (I hadn’t even bothered to ask, for one could see the healthy look in your cheeks and eyes), are now going from doctor to doctor; you must have been ailing every day for weeks; one says to you in fun and yet half-seriously that you look like a corpse on leave (an expression I should like very much were it not applied to you); recently you have had headaches, sore throats, states of languor, and all these repeatedly and actually without a break—dearest, we surely cannot accept this calmly? Surely we must try to put things right? Well, how are you going to start taking care of yourself? You must write and tell me about it at

once and in detail, for I am as much involved in your suffering as you are. I don't exactly get a sore throat every time you have one, but when I hear about it, or suspect it, even only fear it, I suffer from it no less than you, in my own way. And I suffer even more from your exhaustion, and more still from your headaches. And if you then take some aspirin, then I too feel physically sick. All last night, that is from 3:30 to 7:30, and into the early part of the morning, I felt a strange kind of pressure inside myself such as I never remember feeling before in the 30 years of my life; it emanated neither from the stomach, nor from the heart, nor the lungs, but perhaps from all three together. It subsided in daylight. If you took some aspirin yesterday, then I am sure it was due to that; if not, to the previous aspirins; if not that either, then perhaps it was due to my bad writing, and if in the end it wasn't that either, then perhaps I am just a madman who in his mind lays his hands on your temples many times, and hopes his kisses may have the power to kiss away from your forehead all the headaches, from the dimmest past to your golden future. So tell me, dearest, what are you going to do, things cannot go on like this. You must make enough time to sleep, and go for walks, whatever the cost. At the end of office hours you must leave at once, you must go for a walk, and not alone along the Elevated, but with people you like. (But don't you go skating? And it's some time since I heard you mention gymnastics.) And it would not be a bad thing to stop working with the professor; you can write to me in the evening, certainly; you haven't the time during the day, but to condemn myself to have no news of you every day, I definitely haven't the strength to do that; but I shall grit my teeth and be satisfied with a daily postcard until such time as you are (even in your mother's opinion) completely, fundamentally, lastingly, as fresh and rested as before. I am anxious for the ringing applause my suggestions will receive (in which case I have others in readiness) and for further similar suggestions you are going to add to mine.

When you are strong again, then I shall really want to hear a great, great deal about your childhood; your last letter gave me a tremendous appetite for it. Of course there are disadvantages in

being a late-born child, but the advantages compared to those of a firstborn, of which I am the sad but perfect example, are after all very great. These late-born ones are at once surrounded by a variety of partly undergone, partly striven-for realizations, experiences, discoveries, conquests, by their brothers and sisters, and the advantages, advice, and encouragement gained by this close and wholly interdependent family life are enormous. By then the family is far better equipped to deal with them; the parents, as far as it is possible for them, have learned from their mistakes (which, however, have also made them more obstinate); and automatically these late-born ones are settled more warmly in the nest; less attention is paid to them; here advantage and disadvantage fluctuate, the latter never dominating, but they don't need it, for everyone is unconsciously, thus all the more deeply and less harmfully, concerned with them. I am the eldest of six brothers and sisters; two brothers somewhat younger than I died in infancy through the fault of the doctors; then there was a pause; I was the only child until 4–5 years later my three sisters arrived, separated by one and two years respectively. Thus I lived alone for a very long time, battling with nurses, old nannies, spiteful cooks, unhappy governesses, since my parents were always at the shop. There is a great deal to be said about all this. But not tonight, the 12th hour of which, to my horror, is just striking. Farewell, my dearest, and at the risk of waking you, at the risk of waking you, I kiss you.

Franz

December 20, 1912

But dearest, what is it that makes you so anxious? Are we not living side by side as peacefully as is possible in this misery? What comes over you? You are at once both the quiet and the confusion of my heart; imagine my heartbeat when you are in this state. I have read your letter many times with burning cheeks in the hope that some kind of peace, some kind of gaiety, would somewhere show itself. It was surely only the mood of an unfortunate evening, and my

agitated scrap from the office, which I might as well enclose, is really no longer true. For I know that tomorrow will again bring a confident letter from my strong girl, who was overcome by exhaustion and terrible torment for but a single midnight hour.

I abandoned the second daily letter with the best intentions, in the belief that we would both gain more peace and more confidence. This twice-repeated connecting, and twice-repeated breaking-off each day, was terrible for me, and persecuted and worried me incessantly all through the morning and then again all through the afternoon. This futile striving for an impossibility—i.e., your presence—must surely dismay not only me, dearest, but you as well each time it happens. But you may be right after all. Once a day I have to write to you; otherwise I would rather drop everything, otherwise I wouldn't know what to do with myself—and it wouldn't bring you any nearer; but if only it would make you feel a shade calmer, I will start writing twice again. It doesn't matter whether I am in the mood for only one letter to you, that doesn't matter; what matters is whether by writing twice a day I could still manage to summon, at least to some extent, the energy for everything else that is expected of me. Because to let this feeling of oneness with you, which I have in my innermost self, rise and hit me in the face by writing twice a day—that might be too great a risk at this sad distance at which I have to live.

But now I must be off again; I have to go and help Max with a document to be notarized. Come to think of it, it was today that you had to swear in court and had more troubles. Let me kiss you, dearest, pale, tormented child! He who signs himself below belongs to you not like an object in your room, but as you would wish it, and forever.

Yours, Franz

*Written on a Workers' Accident Insurance Institute form* (*List objednávací*) *and enclosed*:

Dearest, I am writing on this paper that happens to be near at hand simply to relieve my worries about you for one moment. Please, please don't get into such a state, nothing good can come of that. If only I could put you down here on a chair beside me, hold you, and look into your eyes. There is something of the lunatic asylum in my life. Innocent, and certainly guilty as well, I am locked up, not in a cell, but in this town; I call out to the dearest of girls, want her to be calm and happy, but in fact I call out only to walls and paper, and my poor girl suffers.

Franz

From December 20 to 21, 1912

I have written nothing, dearest, for three evenings now, a bad start before Christmas. And the Christmas vacation itself is becoming uncertain, though owing to the war scare[113] my sister's wedding—I don't think I have told you this before—has been postponed, but it is very doubtful whether I shall be able to take the two days off as I had hoped. I constantly have a great deal to do, and the more there is the less I feel inclined, or rather, the greater becomes my reluctance. As long as I am in the office myself, this desk piled high with arrears can be defended, though only by bringing into action the ultimate degree of personal influence; but if I stay at home my desk is open to all, and during the day incessant, successive little explosions of arrears would be bound to take place, and that could be very unpleasant on my return. Nevertheless—now that I am writing it all down, I find it unbearable to waste those two days, for I should accomplish little more than the defense of my desk, and so I shall probably decide to risk it.

How is your work going, my girl? (Today I have a feeling that you are now calmer, more contented, and that your precious eyes once again have that friendly yet commanding expression that struck me then and for all time.) Is it possible that you can always finish all your work? Don't some letters get lost in the shuffle and vanish for good? Isn't there a secret drawer where old, neglected things gather

like repulsive animals? Have you a good memory? I have none, and work entirely on the seemingly inexhaustible memory of my chief, who is admirable in other ways, too. If ever he has actually forgotten something I need, I start coaxing his memory with indefinite remarks of a general nature, and it isn't long before he remembers. There are people who need only see a cooperative face, no matter how helpless the person whose face it is, to remember everything at once. I could never work as independently as you seem to; I slither out of responsibility like a snake; I have to sign many things, but every evaded signature seems like a gain; I also sign everything (though I really shouldn't) with FK only, as though that could exonerate me; for this reason I also feel drawn toward the typewriter in anything concerning the office, because its work, especially when executed at the hands of a typist, is so impersonal. This otherwise praiseworthy caution, however, is complemented and cancelled by the fact that I sign even the most important things with the said FK, without reading them, and that owing to my forgetfulness anything that has once left my desk has, so far as I am concerned, never existed. Would all this make me, who recently sought a position in your office, highly commendable?

In today's letter a diary is mentioned. Does it still exist? Is it still being kept? And these words: "I love him and never, whoever may cross my path …" you wrote at the age of 15? Dearest, had I but known you then! We wouldn't be so far apart, I think. We would be sitting at the same table, looking out of the same window into the street. We wouldn't be trembling, one for the other; there would be no impossibilities. But then again I say to myself, and this shows the inevitability of it all: ten years ago, but also two, or even one year ago, I was better at many things, unfortunately, but in myself I was more insecure and more unhappy than today; so perhaps this was after all the right moment for the appearance of the one person who was to become dearer to me than any other on this earth.

I was looking for something today on my desk at home (this desk cannot be tidied either, one can but hunt for things in it; only one drawer is tidy and locked, the one with your letters), when I came across an old letter, dating back to that month's waiting-time; it

belongs to you and so I am sending it, in spite of its not very pleasant condition. When I read it, unfortunately it is not dated, I see with further unreasonable hopes (there is so much I write against my will, only because it is forced out of me; bad, miserable author!) that everything is so much better now, and that one might think the lucky star that has been our guide can never fade from over us. Child, how strangely you write today! I desert the flag? Which flag would that be? It could only be my life's flag. And I could not do that deliberately; I feel too much in the midst of battle, in spite of all my misery. So it won't happen deliberately and by my own hand.

And now farewell, girl, girl! I wish you a pleasant Sunday, amiable parents, delicious food, long walks, a clear head. Tomorrow I shall start to write again, I want to delve into it with all my strength; when not writing I feel myself being pushed out of life by unyielding hands. And perhaps tomorrow I shall have a more cheerful letter than today's *but an equally truthful one*: for considerateness hurts me more than the truth.

Franz

*Enclosed: the undated letter "from that month's waiting-time" of September 28 to October* 23, *1912*:

Dear Fräulein Bauer,

Allow me to write to you, even if a reply to my last letter is still very much in doubt; not writing makes my head ache, makes me unsure of you and of myself. There is developing within me the growing habit that makes it a duty for me to write to you; how could I free myself from this imperious duty simply by accepting your failure to answer? There was a night when I wrote letters to you continuously while half-asleep, it felt like continuous soft hammering.

Franz K.

December 21, 1912

A supplement from the present: To be on the safe side, please write to the apartment from Sunday on. I don't want letters sent to the office until next Friday. And where do you want your letters sent?

[PICTURE POSTCARD]

December 21, 1912

Very first morning-greetings. At this moment I am getting ready for an immense walk, such as I do not remember taking for weeks. Perhaps it will last as long as one hour. If so, I shall make an effort to walk once up and down this Alchemists' Lane,[114] as it is pictured here.

FK

[TOP RIGHT, IN THE SPACE PROVIDED FOR THE STAMP] Oh dearest, it's no good, I just can't send this open postcard. What kind of a night would it be if on its eve I had not sent you kisses, and taken some for myself?

Franz

December 22, 1912

Morning

Do you know, dearest, I was actually overjoyed by the story about Herr Neble, provided it was the only reason for your low spirits in the last few days. So that was all? Of course it may have been pretty unpleasant. But that you would emerge triumphant, I could have told you in advance; I envy Director Heinemann his wonderful part, which I could have played even better. "Just shut the door, Frl. Bauer," is what I would have said too. And then you would have had to tell me the story, for after all you are not much more reticent with me than you are with your director; why, I ask myself, was I not allowed to hear the story about that Neble at once on the first day? And if I were your director, how I would have listened! Night would have come, and then morning, and the staff would have

arrived for a new day's work, and in answer to my endless questions you would still have to be talking endlessly. One thing I probably would not have done as well as your director: at sight of your first tears I might possibly, in spite of my customary tearlessness, have cried with you in a most undirectorial manner. And to preserve my dignity there would have been no alternative but to lay my cheek against yours, to allow our tears to mingle indistinguishably. Dearest, dearest Felice! How you are made to suffer!

Do you lose your temper easily? I don't on the whole, but when I do, I really feel closer to God than at other times. When the blood begins to boil all at once, from head to foot, fists twitching in one's pockets, when everything in one detaches itself from all self-control, and this very powerlessness to control oneself reveals itself—in another, indeed the true sense—as power, then one realizes that anger should be avoided only in its lowest beginnings. Only last night I came very close to slapping somebody's face, and not with one hand, but with both, and not just once, but repeatedly. In the end I contented myself with words, but they were strong. It is not at all impossible that the memory of Neble contributed.

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Afternoon

There, my dearest Felice, now I am with you again. Last evening when I had returned from my long walk—I had meant to go alone, but on my way to the station I met my entire family, who had just come from my married sister's, and the entreaties of my youngest sister and a cousin were so persistent I had to take them along—when I got home from this walk it occurred to me, and I couldn't get it out of my head for a long time, that you may be angry with me on account of my overanxious second Saturday letter, or not really angry (after all, I didn't write anything wrong), but disappointed that I too am not the one to whom grievances can be aired without any consideration—which is the best and most alleviating way of airing them—without the slightest consideration for oneself or the world around one. And I was not altogether wrong to be apprehensive last night; I think I can see that from your express letter. You say, for example: "When your letter arrived with the 10

o’clock mail this morning, I was sadder, more depressed than before.” A fine kind of lover is he who writes that sort of letter to his beloved, and adds to her suffering. No, listen to me, dearest, you will not leave me, you have said so many times, but I want to be very close to you in every respect; don’t withhold from me any part of you, not even your complaints. Stay with me entirely, dearest, stay for me as you are; I would not wish a single hair on your head to turn any way other than it does. Don’t try to be gay if you are not. For cheerfulness, resolutions are not enough, cheerful circumstances are needed as well. I won’t find you any more attractive if you look better, I shall only find you as attractive as I do now. The nearness I feel to you is too great for any change of moods, of appearance, to have any effect on my relationship with you. I will only be unhappy when you are unhappy, and out of love for you as much as out of self-interest I will attempt to remove the unhappiness. There won’t be any other noticeable effect of unhappiness—with the exception of these letters, hastily scribbled during the day, in which one cannot rise above a momentary meaningless agitation, another warning, by the way, against twice-daily writing.

And am *I* not complaining? It is almost a howl! Yesterday, for example, I completely collapsed at the office. My head was bursting from lack of sleep (yet I have written nothing for nights on end, except to you); whatever I happened to lean against, there I remained, leaning; I was afraid to sit down in my armchair for fear of not being able to get up again; in order to keep myself awake while reading files, I held the lower end of my pen against my temple—then in the afternoon I slept a little, but didn’t feel any better in the evening, which is why I went for that walk, but then again slept very lightly, as though on watch. If we cannot use arms, dearest, let us embrace with complaints.

Franz

December 22–23, 1912

Dearest, I am in a state of considerable confusion; don't take amiss the lack of clarity in anything I may write. I am writing to you because I am wholly filled with you and must in some way let it be known to the outside world. I roamed around all Sunday in a wretched state, spent most of the time with people, did not sleep at all, unexpectedly visited friends, unexpectedly went away again; I have not felt like this for months. It is because I have not done any writing for far too long and feel somewhat cut off from it—i.e., in a void. Added to which, the longed-for Christmas vacation is now here, and I am about to waste it shamefully. And beneath it all of course lurks the thought that I could be in Berlin, with you, in my safest refuge, and instead I stay in Prague as though afraid I might otherwise lose my ultimate security, and as though you were actually here in Prague.

Dearest, when I got home yesterday evening in this pleasant mood and found your telegram on the table, you dearest, compassionate heart, I wasn't at all scared, but knew at once that it could contain nothing but comfort, and when it turned out to be so, I kissed this alien paper, a long kiss with eyes closed, until this was no longer enough for me, and I pressed it flat against my cheek.

Dearest, you would certainly never guess what time it was when the above was written. It must have been 4. Under the influence of the telegram I had gone to bed very early, before 9 (I handle myself somewhat capriciously), woke up at 2, and awake, with my eyes open, but still under the influence of sleep, and therefore with uninterrupted and rather magical visions, I thought of you, and of a possible journey to Berlin. Beautiful, easy connections were effected, without any trouble, motorcars soared like lovers, telephone conversations worked as though one were holding hands at the time, I had better stop thinking about it—the more awake I was, the more restless I became, then got out of bed about 4, did my exercises, washed, and wrote two pages for myself, but felt too restless to go on, then wrote these preceding two pages, but abandoned them as well, and with a buzzing head went back to bed where I stayed until 9 in the morning in a heavy sleep in which, by the way, you also appeared, for a brief conversation with a friend's

family.—Of course this whole strange way of life is due simply to the fact that in the first place I haven't written anything for some while, and in the second, my time is practically my own, without my yet having adjusted myself to it.

Dearest Felice! Your Franz

[OWING TO THE SMALL SPACE, THE TWO NAMES ARE WRITTEN CLOSE TOGETHER: KAFKA ADDED IN THE MARGIN] Here at least we are together.

*On a separate page, enclosed*:

[December 23, 1912]

Your Saturday night letter has just arrived. I won't answer it until this afternoon, otherwise you won't get this letter at 9. Will everything now really improve as much as your letter suggests? May God grant it. The fortitude and good humor of your letter, by the way, puts me to shame, but I shall get on my feet again, too. Oh, if Frl. Lindner only knew how difficult it is to write as little as I do!

The other day you mentioned a bomb about to go off. Your mother's arrival prevented you from writing more. What happened to that bomb?—Let me tell you, dearest, with kisses rather than with words, how much I love you.

Franz

December 23, 1912

Dearest Felice, I have finally organized these two precious days in such a way that I go to the office for a little while in the morning to look at the mail, but for the rest I live as a free man. Saturday and Sunday, apart from writing briefly during the night, were frittered away, but this is not really too bad, dearest. Say that it's not too bad.

What's more, I am gradually beginning to savor the pleasures of this life of ease, and yesterday's and last night's confusion is gradually fading. What do you say to my idea of having yesterday's

telegram framed and hanging it over my desk? From your Saturday night letter I now see that already on Saturday you had the idea of sending a telegram, nevertheless—what was in your mind, dearest, when you sent the telegram, since you could not possibly have foreseen the significance it would have for me, especially since the letter you got in the morning was—as far as I remember—relatively calm? And besides, originally you meant to send the telegram in the morning; but had it arrived in the morning, I would only (only! only!) have taken it to be a token of your love and kindness, but in the evening (you appear to have sent it at 4) it virtually raised me from the ground. The proximity of that kind of telegram is entirely different to the remoteness from which letters slowly draw near. Now I also know that things were all right with you, hence with both of us, until 4 in the afternoon, even if no Sunday letter has arrived. Perhaps the letter arrived later at the office, it wasn't there in the morning, anyway I will look again, perhaps you sent it to the wrong address. In any case I shall send tonight's letter to your apartment. Your intentions, dearest, are excellent, and if you keep to them carefully, I shall have a model sweetheart. But you have to be that, if you have such a feckless lover. If you haven't got pink cheeks, how can I make them pale, since that is my job? If you are not lively, how can I make you tired; if you are not gay, how can I depress you? Dearest, my dearest, out of love for you, only out of love, I would like to dance with you; for I now feel that dancing, this embracing and turning at the same time, belongs inseparably to love and is its true and crazy expression. Oh God, I have said a lot in this letter, but my head is just as full of love as of things to tell you.

Yours, Franz

From [December] 23 to 24, [1912]

Dearest, what will happen when I cannot write any more? This moment seems to have arrived; for a week or more I have accomplished nothing; in the course of the last ten nights (admittedly working with frequent interruptions) I was really

carried away only once, that was all. I am permanently tired, my craving for sleep goes around and around in my head. Tension right and left at the top of my skull. Yesterday I began a little story which I had very much at heart and which appeared to open up before me at one stroke;[115] today it is completely closed up; when I ask what will happen, I am not thinking of myself, I have lived through worse times, and am still more or less alive, and if I am not going to write for myself, I shall have more time to write to you, to enjoy the nearness of you, this nearness which I have created by thinking, by writing, and by fighting with all the strength of my soul—but you, you will not be able to love me any more. Not because I am not going to write for myself any more, but because this not writing will turn me into a poorer, more unbalanced, less secure being, whom you could not possibly like. Dearest, if you make poor children in the street happy, do it to me too, I am no less poor; you have no idea how great my affinity is with the old man who goes home in the evening with his unsold wares—so do unto me as you would to all of them, even if your mother should be angry about this as she was about the others (everyone has to bear his burden unconditionally; for parents it is the anger over their children's innocent nature): in short, tell me you will go on loving me, no matter how I behave go on loving me at any price, there is no disgrace I would not be prepared to bear—but where is this leading me?

These are the rambling thoughts of this brain on holiday, when it is resting! *In these circumstances haven't I every reason to stick steadily to the office, work like the wind through all arrears, and become a keen, methodical official whose whole head is on the job?* There remains the argument that perhaps I am bewildered by these first two free days and in my haste don't know where to begin; after all, I don't remember ever having had a better Christmas (tomorrow I shall look up some of the old diaries for you)—but this whole argument is not to be taken too seriously. Here, as elsewhere, the only thing that counts is Either–Or. Either I can do a thing, or not, and this time the matter ends with the "Or."

As long as after the question “Do you love me, Felice?” the big “Yeses” follow each other into eternity, everything else can be conquered.

Franz

December 24, 1912

Yesterday, Monday, I had only your Saturday letter; today, Tuesday, nothing at all. How can I make the best of that? I would treasure the briefest postcard greeting! Dearest, don’t detect reproaches in this, they are not there, but detect love, and love’s anxiety, of which everything I write is full. (Yesterday evening I found nothing from you at the office.)

Franz

[December 24, 1912]

Since at last I have written a little for myself, I am gaining courage, take your arm (I have never held anything more tenderly than you during this interrogation that is to follow), and ask straight into your beloved eyes: “Has there been, Felice, in the last three months, a single day on which you have not had news from me? You see, there hasn’t been such a day. But today, Tuesday, you leave me entirely without news; since 4 o’clock on Sunday I know nothing about you; until tomorrow’s delivery that will be no less than 66 hours, filled in my mind with every alternating good and bad contingency.” Dearest, don’t be angry with me for this idle talk, but 66 hours really is a long time. I am well aware of all that has prevented you: it’s Christmas, you have visitors, the mail is unreliable (perhaps even my letter did not arrive punctually), but even so—66 hours! And yet—there is one more thing I have to say before going to sleep—on my free days I can still bear the absence of letters comparatively well—though I have no news of you, I am free, nothing prevents me from thinking about you all the time, and be it only a one-sided contact, it extends almost, almost to your

room, so strong, so essential and absolute are the forces that create it. Therefore, dearest, if at any time you cannot let me have news of you, let it be a Sunday or a holiday when I hear nothing of you. That is why it was bearable today; it was not nearly as bad as you might think, judging by the solemnity of the early part of this letter. The absence of eagerly awaited news is terrible only on weekdays. For then it is forbidden to think about you, tiresome demands are made upon me from all sides, a letter from you or a postcard gives me a sense of security, I don't have to think about you, I need only put my hand in my pocket to touch the paper with your writing on it, to know you are thinking of me, that you are alive, fortunately for me. But if the pocket is empty, and the head—with thoughts of nothing but you racing around in it—should be ready for office work, then a serious contrast is created, and believe me, dearest, it is extremely difficult to deal with.—Earlier on, in the old days, when no letter arrived, I wrote: I shall not expect another, everything will come to an end. Today I say: though letter writing should stop, we should be so close to each other to make it not only unnecessary to write letters, but the excessive closeness would even make it impossible to speak.

Now I remember: today is Holy Night [Christmas Eve]. For me it has passed in an unholy fashion, except for this farewell kiss.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] From Friday on I will be back at the office.

Wednesday, December 25, 1912, 3 P.M.

I am writing these few words, dearest, not to write to you—anyway you are sure to get them at the same time as a later, more comprehensive letter—but to feel again some contact with you, to have actually done something to establish this contact, that's why I am writing. I upset the entire Christmas mail by furiously demanding my letters from the mailman; I was on the stairs, was about to go out, all hope had been abandoned, after all it was then 12:15 P.M. At last, at last a wonderful mail, the start of the Christmas

holidays, two letters, one postcard, one picture, flowers. Dearest, quite-wildly-to-be-smothered-in-kisses dearest, how can I thank you with this feeble hand?

Well, now I am going for a walk with a friend whom I may not have mentioned before—Weltsch.[116] I must hurry away, because relatives with extremely penetrating voices have just arrived, the whole apartment is shaking; I shall escape unseen, unheard, through the hall. If only it were with you! For your sake I would even slacken my pace down the stairs; for I am in the habit—it is the only sport (by the way, self-invented) that I indulge in—of racing downstairs, a terror to all who are coming up. The weather is lovely; may you, dearest, have a good rest; I enjoy every moment of these Christmas days twice as much when I remember that you are able to rest and recover. So no writing, but a telegram, if that's possible. This nightly turning off the light, which your mother practices, is very much to my liking; if she knew, she would probably leave the light on; on the other hand, that again would be to my liking.

Franz

I hope you were handed the 2 letters I wrote to the apartment? They were letters particularly unsuitable, I think, for the eyes of others.

From December 25 to 26, 1912

The novel has gone ahead a little, I am sticking to it, since my story has rejected me. From the start of the story I made too many demands upon myself; at the very beginning four characters are supposed to talk and be vigorously involved in everything. But I can fully visualize as many characters as that only when they come into being and develop in the course, and from the flow, of the story. Right at the beginning I unfortunately mastered only two, but if four people are pressing forward, trying to take the floor, and the writer has eyes only for two, the result is a sad, an almost social embarrassment. These two refuse to be unmasked. But because my

eyes stray all over the place, they might catch some shadows of these two, but then the two solid characters, being temporarily abandoned, become uncertain, and finally it all collapses. A pity!

But now I am really too tired; owing to all kinds of interruptions I have not slept at all during the day; I sleep far more on working days. I have much to tell you, but now my exhaustion has turned off the main tap. If only, instead of writing my novel, I had written to you, as I very much wanted to! I was so eager to start the letter and so prepare for my writing by covering the paper with kisses, because it will be held by you. But now I am tired and dull, and more than your kisses I should need that lively look of yours, which can be detected in today's photograph. Today I shall tell you only what I object to in that picture: Your eyes refuse to meet mine, they always ignore me; I turn the picture this way and that, you invariably manage to look the other way, calmly and as though deliberately to look the other way. On the other hand I have the opportunity of pulling the whole face toward me by kissing it, which I do, and shall do again just before going to sleep, and shall do again when I wake up. If it is worth mentioning, my lips are entirely yours, I kiss no one else, neither parents, nor sisters, and implacable aunts find a spot only on a reluctant cheek.

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December 26, 1912, Thursday morning

At last I have a picture of you, as you were when I saw you—not, of course, as I first saw you (without a jacket, with head bare, unframed by any hat), but as you were when I lost you in the doorway of the hotel, as you were when I walked beside you along the Graben, when I felt no affinity with you, yet longed only for the closest affinity. I've just thought of something: isn't it a habit of yours to keep pushing your hair off your forehead, especially when you are holding a picture and want to look down at it? Does my memory betray me? For I sometimes see you that way. The hat is there too, the underside of which I, in my blindness, took to be white. But the blouse must be a different one, the Prague blouse surely was white. I have just kissed you, whereupon your smile was

a trifle more friendly than before. What have you to say, dearest, dearest child, to your picture's behavior? For the next few days at least I shan't carry the little case and the picture in my pocket, but in my fist, as a prop, protection, and strengthener. It would be strange indeed if the owner of a picture such as this could not hold his own in every way. And you, dearest, are you somewhat rested yet? Don't your relatives make you run around too much? You wouldn't have had time for me even if I had come to Berlin. But what am I saying? Is this the way to put an end to my self-reproaches? After all, wasn't I right not to have gone to Berlin? But when will I ever see you again? This summer? But why this summer, if I didn't see you at Christmas? It is a sunny morning just now, I have had a reasonable amount of sleep, yet I feel more insecure than in the depths of night. I have a lot to say about your mother, but I will leave it for my next letter. The pleasure I derive from devouring everything you write about your mother's remarks concerning me is strange. To some extent it is the pleasure of being attacked with such hostility (if with the best intentions) and so powerfully and charmingly defended. But that doesn't altogether explain this pleasure. I want to be mentioned all the time within your family. What a paradoxical desire!

But now it is nearly noon. Up, up! Adieu, Felice! Picture into its case! Letter into envelope, and away to the station to mail it!

Franz

> I am enclosing my last sanatorium's[117] Christmas greetings, they arrived at the same time as your picture. Just see with what devilish deceit I wanted some alien faith to cure me. But it didn't help much, either.

*On an enclosed slip of paper*:
Have just thought of another urgent matter: Surely, dearest, you didn't make a present to your sister of the blouse you wore that time in Prague?

That little case you sent me is a magic case. It is making a different, calmer, better man of me. The possibility of looking at the picture wherever I happen to be, or at least of pulling out the little case (the notion of carrying it constantly in my hand has not proved successful), is again a new delight, which I owe to you. Whenever I look at your picture—it is standing in front of me now—I marvel at the strength which binds us together; at how, beyond all this which is visible, beyond the charming face, the calm eyes, the smile, the (actually narrow) shoulders, which should promptly be hugged—how beyond all this, forces so close, so indispensable to me, are at work; I marvel at the mystery of it all—a mystery which an insignificant person like me shouldn't look at, he should simply immerse himself in it.

But I am so engrossed in the picture I don't get a chance to continue this letter—something you never considered, dearest, when giving the present. I think it will help me in every way; tomorrow I shall do better in that ghastly office, I shall pluck out of my pile of files, if only with the tips of my fingers, some of the oldest neglected papers; I have also decided, which is not inconsiderable, that come what may I shall never start writing after 10 P.M. and never stay up (unless the next day is a holiday) after 2 A.M.; finally (all this, to make myself worthy of your present) I bitterly regret the letter you received on the 2nd Christmas holiday;[118] rebuke me in the letter that is due tomorrow, a letter I am looking forward to with fear and pleasure; yes, rebuke me with all your might in that letter; he who reproaches his beloved for no reason, and disrupts her morning sleep with stupid talk on a holiday, deserves not only to be scolded, he deserves (to mention something very unpleasant, almost unbearable), he deserves to get no letter for two whole days. So don't worry, dearest, I won't be so faint-hearted again; forgive me; all the misery I inflict upon you stems from one source: my love for you. If at times I hurt your feelings without realizing it, then keep looking for the reason in my love, and there, on some confounded path (that's just the way I am), you are sure to find it. Once again I

have told you nothing, nothing, not even how I have spent my days. Well, your picture knows it all. Should you pass by the photographer's, tell him that not one of his pictures will be kissed as often as this one.

Franz

Night of December 27 to 28, 1912

My dearest, if the little case, for which I am indebted to you, can stand the immense demands I put upon it for any length of time, then it is a good little case. There are times when my longing for you overwhelms me. The case is ripped open, and in a friendly and charming manner you at once present yourself to my insatiable scrutiny. In the light of street lamps, outside illuminated shop windows, at my desk in the office, at a sudden standstill in the corridors, beside a drowsy typist, by the window in the living room, while a large gathering of friends and relatives fills the room behind me—dearest, dearest, I cannot always articulate even this one short word when thinking about you, for so often I can think of you only with teeth clenched. And because this little photograph is so inexhaustible, it actually produces as much pleasure as pain. It does not fade away, it does not disintegrate like a living thing; instead it will survive forever, a permanent comfort; it cannot altogether satisfy me, but it won't leave me, either.

Of course I said to myself at once (from self-interest! from cunning! from presence of mind!): now that the miraculous effect of pictures has been established, you too must certainly have a picture of me. I hastened at once to the photographer to get him to take a picture of identical size, but our high-speed photographers are slower than yours; it won't be ready for a week. I was seized moreover with such greed by your idea, dearest, that I propose a monthly exchange of these little pictures. Your appearance must surely alter, the seasons advance, you wear different clothes—no, dearest, I am asking too much, I'm going too far. I must be content

to possess this picture for which I should thank you again in every letter.

Your Thursday letter, the one that stopped abruptly after the first five words, looks quite frightening at first glance, as though some malevolent and mighty hand had seized your hands, or had inflicted on you even worse things. Well, I say to myself, you still addressed the envelope, enclosed the newspaper clippings, perhaps even mailed the letter, so nothing very serious can have happened, and tomorrow I can expect a letter again.

I don't quite understand your mother behaving so tyrannically toward you; whereas in every other way I understand her so well. By supporting yourself don't you occupy a special position at home, above all vis-à-vis your sister who as far as I know only helps with the household? And does no one respect this exceptional position of yours? While your mother appears to be committing a grave injustice by underestimating your work, she is right in everything else. She was right in the seaside resort when she refused to leave your side (Ah, what was the young man up to? Away with him!); she is right to be angry about my letters (perhaps even about this one, though it gives her her due); only in a dream, if then, could I see myself convincing her of the necessity of these letters, and after all she is right—and how right she is!—if she considers any way of life other than marriage between man and woman to be futile. For instance, have I not often declared myself to be futile?

You enclose the *Berliner Tageblatt*'s inquiry without any comment, which was quite right! What abysmally stupid questions they ask! In this way the paper takes on a kind of human, if idiotic, character. All answers that fail to make the stupidity of the question clear are bad, since they just don't correspond to the questions. Yet these questions are so easy to answer that I shall immediately answer them both: "He" certainly has to be good-looking. "She," on the other hand, has to be no more and no less than precisely what she is.[119]

If she is precisely what she is, one cannot part from her in the depths of night and would want to go on and on writing to her in the futile hope of thereby making her come to life before one's eyes.

You must have received [Max Brod's] *Intensity of Feeling* by now. The explanation for the two different handwritings in the dedication is that this book is one of 20 copies of the de luxe edition, each of which had Max's signature in it from the start. But this looked bleak, and so, to be honest, I asked him to add to it.

Today I got a letter from Löwy; I am enclosing it so that you can see the way he writes. I found his address—without letting you know—some time ago, and have also had several letters from him in the meantime. They are all much the same, and full of complaints; there is no help for the poor man; now for no reason he keeps going back and forth between Leipzig and Berlin. In the past his letters were quite different, far more lively and optimistic; perhaps he has really reached the end. You thought he was Czech; no, he is Russian.

Adieu, dearest, whatever happens, we'll go on loving each other, won't we? Where are your lips?

Franz

From December 28 to 29, 1912

My dearest child, highly instructive things are happening in my novel just now. Have you ever seen the demonstrations that take place in American towns on the eve of a judge's election? I'm sure you haven't, any more than I have, but in my novel these demonstrations are in full swing.[120]

Only a few words for now, my dearest, it's nearly 2 o'clock, and for the past week I invariably get a buzzing in the head if I go to bed after 2. Could it be that instead of my getting used to these nightly vigils, I can bear them less and less? My yawning at the office is downright disgraceful; I yawn at the directors, at my chief, the clients, in short at anyone who happens to get in my way. But I am hoping my 2 o'clock bedtime will help to cure my weakness.

Dearest, shall I tell you what a pitiful creature I am? Would it not be better to hide it from you, so as not to prejudice myself in your eyes? But don't I have to tell you, since we belong together, as close

together as is possible with time and space as our enemies? In that case, I have to tell you.

Your second letter today made me jealous. You are amazed and think you have not read rightly? Yes, jealous. All letters in which as many people are mentioned as for example in today's letter make me helplessly jealous. I remember now, it was also a letter of this kind that produced that mounting frenzy, followed by that horrible letter which forever will leave me in your debt. Yes, I am jealous of all the people in your letter, those named and those unnamed, men and girls, business people and writers (writers above all, needless to say). I am jealous of your Warsaw representative (or perhaps "jealous" is not the right word, perhaps I am only "envious"); I am jealous of the people who offer you better jobs, I am jealous of Frl. Lindner (Brühl and Grossmann are little girls, you are allowed them —reluctantly); I am jealous of Werfel, Sophocles, Ricarda Huch,[121] Lagerlöf,[122] Jacobsen.[123] My jealousy is childishly pleased because you call Eulenberg Hermann instead of Herbert, while Franz no doubt is deeply engraved on your brain. (You like the *Silhouettes*? You find them pithy and clear?) "Mozart" is the only one I know in its entirety, Eulenberg (no, he's not from Prague, he's from the Rhine) gave a reading of it here, but I could hardly bear it, the breathless unclean prose. But his plays are said to be charming, I don't know them. Yes, now I remember reading one of his works in *Pan*—good in many ways—I think it was called "Letter from a Father to His Son."[124] But of course there is no doubt that in my present condition I am doing him a grave injustice. *But you ought not to read the* Silhouettes. And now I see that you are even "very enthusiastic" about him. (Listen everyone: Felice is very enthusiastic about him, very enthusiastic indeed, and here am I raging against him in the middle of the night.) But other people are to be found in your letter as well; I want to start a fight with them all, the whole lot, not because I mean to do them any harm, but to drive them away from you, to get you away from them, to read only letters that are concerned solely with you, your family, and the two little ones, and of course, of course, me! But dearest, I am not quite mad, I want to hear about everything, my insistent love has invaded you too

deeply for me to be truly and basically jealous (if you read the *Silhouettes* I am convinced we shall eventually share the dislike on my part, and the enthusiasm on your part—i.e., I shall be enthusiastic about the one copy you happen to hold in your hands, that's all), but—to make you know me completely—I only wanted to describe the impression your letter made upon me this afternoon, admittedly the time when I am at a low ebb.

In fact I received the letter when I got back from the office, it had actually arrived by the 11 o'clock mail. This seems to do credit to the Austrian postal service. But just think—so capricious is our mail—the letter was delivered not to our house but to my parents' business address, more than half a mile away. This doesn't matter in the least as such, for my mail is not scrutinized, and the letter was immediately taken from the shop to the apartment—but it should be proof that my inconsiderate anxiety, sometimes so upsetting to you, can almost be excused by such capricious deliveries.

What also contributed to the afternoon's depression was that I said to myself: I have had two letters today, that's wonderful, but who knows whether I shall get another tomorrow, Sunday. It seems to me Felice assumed that this letter would not arrive until Sunday, but now it's already here, so tomorrow perhaps I shall be left sitting, or rather writhing in my bed, without news. May this not be so!

But then I came to the sentence: "Now I easily surpass you in the writing of long letters," and that finished me off. I repeat: I am not crazy; even a fool would know that this remark was quite irrelevant, and was dropped quite fortuitously. But believe me, Felice (I must almost have been in a trance when I read it), at that moment I thought it meant goodbye; I had not written enough, that's why it would end. Dearest, but now I hug you tighter than ever to make completely sure of you again after this morbid sensitivity that gnaws at me from time to time.

What's more, these moods—undoubtedly due only to separation and perhaps some constitutional defect on my part—did not end there, but were summed up in a dream I had in the afternoon, about which I will tell you tomorrow (though by then a lot will have been

forgotten). But now goodnight, dearest, and a long, calm, confident kiss.

Franz

[December 29, 1912]

My dearest benefactress, so there was another letter after all, and what a letter, wonderful beyond all measure. When the bell rang at 10:30—it could hardly have been anyone but the mailman—I stood behind the glass door in my room and tried to console myself in advance: “There can’t be a letter,” I said to myself, “how could there be another letter today, Felice really can’t write herself sick. You will definitely have to be patient until tomorrow.” And truly I trembled in my plight.

Dearest, once again this is the kind of letter that makes one go hot with silent joy. It is not full of all those friends and writers, there ——

just there I was interrupted; that was this afternoon, and now it is so late I daren’t even look; I shall creep out of the locked house to the station (ah, if my father and my relatives knew, I haven’t seen them since the morning) and mail this scrap of paper. For my own peace of mind I can’t let you be without Sunday’s news on Monday. I am fairly well, except that I have been robbed of my time; how could I not be well as long as you love me. But now I must run!

Franz

From December 29 to 30, 1912

Dearest, this was a bad Sunday. As though anticipating its disturbances, I lay in bed endlessly this morning, although I should have gone somewhere in connection with the factory, which (though invisible to the rest of the world) makes me worry and feel conscience-stricken. By this futile lying in bed (your letter didn’t arrive until 11), everything else was delayed; and when after lunch —which didn’t start till 2:30—I began my letter to you, happy at

being able to linger with you for a while, quietly in the quiet apartment (owing to general afternoon sleep), I was rung up by that Dr. Weltsch who is not just a casual acquaintance, but a real friend of mine. His name, by the way, is Felix, and I am glad to have been on terms of friendship with that name for so long; now of course this name has dissolved its last letters and taken on a profound meaning. So it was this Felix who rang me up while I was writing to Felice, and reminded me of an appointment to go for a walk with him, his sister, and a girl friend (needless to say, his sister's), just as I had done last Thursday. And though I didn't enjoy it last Thursday (from time to time and most of the time I am afraid of girls), and though I had only just started that absorbing letter, and though I also had an appointment with Max, and though I had every reason to fear that after the walk I wouldn't have the necessary time for sleep, I accepted immediately and eagerly because, confronted by the telephone, if only a house telephone, I am helpless; and anyway, I didn't want to keep the girls waiting. But when I got downstairs and, irritated by all my misgivings, came face to face with people instead of that dreadful telephone, and found, besides the three, another girl and a young man, I quickly made up my mind, accompanied them only as far as the bridge, and took my leave, thereby disrupting the traffic near the Toll House[125] and treading on the toes of a woman behind me. With relief I then hurried to Max. But now that's enough about this Sunday, for it has led to the sad result that I can write no more today since it is already long past 11, and the tension and twitchings in my head are of a kind unknown to me until this week. Not to write, and yet to have an urge, an urge, a screaming urge to write!

By the way, now I know more precisely why yesterday's letter made me so jealous: You don't like my book [*Meditation*] any more than you liked my photograph. This really wouldn't matter, for what is written there is largely old stuff, but nevertheless still a part of me, hence a part of me unknown to you. But this wouldn't matter at all, I feel your presence so acutely in everything else that I should be quite prepared—provided you are very close to me—to be the *first* to kick the little book aside with *my* foot. If you love me in the

present, the past can abide where it will, if necessary as far removed as fears for the future. But why don't you tell me, tell me in two words, that you don't like it!—You wouldn't have to say you don't like it (which probably wouldn't be true anyway), but simply that you can't make head or tail of it. It really is full of hopeless confusion, or rather there are glimpses into endless perplexities, and one has to come very close to see anything at all. And so it would be quite understandable if you did not like the book, but hope would remain that at some favorable and weak moment it might yet entice you. In any case, no one will know what to make of it, that is and was perfectly clear to me; the trouble the spendthrift publisher took and the money he lost, both utterly wasted, prey on my mind too. Its publication came about quite by chance, perhaps I will tell you about it some time; it would never have occurred to me on my own. I am telling you all this simply to make it clear to you that an uncertain opinion on your part would have seemed quite natural to me. But you said nothing, or rather you did once announce that something would be said, but did not say it. It is the same as it was with Neble, of whom you would not let me hear for a long time. Dearest, look, I do want to feel that you turn to me with everything; nothing, not the slightest thing should be withheld, for we belong—or so I thought—together; I may not like a favorite blouse of yours as such, but because you are wearing it, I will like it; you don't like my book as such, but insofar as it is I who wrote it you will surely like it—well, then one should say so, and say *both*.

Dearest, I am sure you are not angry with me on account of this long lecture, for of the two of us, it is you who are clarity, and it seems to me that all the clarity I possess I learned that August evening from your eyes. That I didn't learn all that much, you can see from the dream I had yesterday.

No, I won't describe it now, for I have just remembered that you, dearest, are suffering, at least were suffering on Friday evening. So that's what is worrying you at home? I had no idea about that either, but this must be the fault of my own denseness. Poor dearest child, to get drawn into this kind of thing as well, that's terrible! It's not like that here; my mother is my father's devoted slave, and my

father her devoted tyrant, which is fundamentally why there has always been perfect harmony, and the sorrows we have all shared, particularly in the last few years, are due entirely to my father's ill health; he suffers from hardening of the arteries, but because of the existing harmony this could not really touch the innermost core of the family.

At this very moment my father next door is turning over violently in bed. He is a big, strong man; fortunately he has been feeling better recently, but his illness is an ever-threatening one. The family's harmony is really upset only by me, and more so as the years go by; very often I don't know what to do, and feel a great sense of guilt toward my parents and everyone else. Thus I too have my share of suffering, my dearest distant girl, within and through my family, except that I deserve it more than you. On more than one occasion in the past, I have stood by the window at night playing with the catch, feeling it almost my duty to open the window and throw myself out. But that is long past, and now the knowledge of your love has made me a more confident person than I have ever been before.

Goodnight, dearest, sad kisses are comforting too, and sadness makes the lips linger endlessly upon the other's, not wanting to tear themselves away.

Franz

Dearest, once again: I am going to write regularly only once a day, my fitful letters during the day make me unhappy, and the feeling that you might even once expect a letter at 10 o'clock in vain burns me up. *So expect no letter, dearest, ignore the sad glances from Frl Brühl, whom by the way I should like to thank, but don't know how to.*

Are you going to the office on New Year's Day? Please write to me at home. I too will write to you at home.

[IN THE MARGIN] What's the joke about the *Berliner Tageblatt*? What was it you had to forgive me for? Precise explanation!

Night of December 30 to 31, 1912

At last, dearest, you tell me about a walk you took, and I am happy. Isn't this the first hour for months spent in the open? Are you really quite well leading that nerve-racking life? I am strangely calm just now, and it does not seem to be only tiredness. But this morning before your second letter arrived I was in a kind of turmoil. For absolutely no apparent reason. It is just this: one writes and for the time being feels close, imagines one is holding on to the other but in fact one is only groping in the air, and as a result one is bound occasionally to fall. But dearest, we won't leave each other, will we? And should one of us fall, the other will pick him up. Your letter makes this Frl. Lindner sound like my tribunal; although she has not yet written to me, I am very much aware of her reproach. Dearest, you have proved your love with long letters, now prove it with short ones. Don't write by candlelight when the electric light is turned off; the thought of it takes my breath away with worry. Now you are helping with the household too; you are suffering from your parents, crying about your sister in Budapest—if only I could be with you entirely, and these worries were at all times our worries, then I would feel better. But here I sit all alone (the clock is still ticking far too loudly in my coat pocket, I hide it there on account of its loud strike), racking my brains for some means by which you and I could be helped.

Just why does a letter from your sister reduce you to tears? What is wrong with her? Is she homesick? Just homesick? But she's got her husband, and the child. And in Budapest German is spoken by some 100,000 people, and in two years she must surely have learned a little Hungarian. Isn't her husband with her? Perhaps he travels a lot? What is the main cause of her unhappiness and your compassion? And it occurs to me that she may even have been in Budapest for more than 2 years, and still hasn't got used to it? And she has the child as well; where is there room for pity?

You said it yourself in your typing room to those peculiar ladies. And I—though fully aware of condemning myself—would not have expressed it any other way, for these words are always on the tip of

my tongue, and I repeat them more often than is good for me. Only last Sunday afternoon Max said to me on a similar occasion: “You talk like a girl.” But this is not quite true, for in an excellent collection of Napoleon’s sayings,[126] which for some time now I have been dipping into whenever I can, these words are recorded: “It is terrible to die childless,” and he was by no means sorry for himself; friends, for instance, whether by choice or necessity, were not indispensable to him. He once said: “I haven’t a friend other than Daru, who is callous and cold and suits me.” And to judge the true depth this man had access to, take this remark: “He who knows from the beginning where he is going, will not get far.” So that when he talks of the terror of childlessness, one may believe him. And I have to be prepared to take this upon myself, for apart from everything else I would never dare expose myself to the risk of being a father.

I don’t know why it is that for the last few days all my letters seem to end in sadness. These spells come and go, and I beg you on my knees not to be angry about it. Also I’ve remembered too late that this letter will arrive on New Year’s morning, and will usher in a New Year that should be wholly ours. For this purpose I have invented a new bond between us. I am going to buy a calendar with a lovely picture for each day, and every morning in my letter I shall enclose the page with the date of the letter’s arrival and have it placed on your desk. Although as a result I myself shall be a trifle ahead of time, and calendar-wise will actually have lived through the day you are about to live through, we shall nevertheless live facing the same calendar page, and this will make my life seem sweeter.

Where will you be on New Year’s Eve? Dancing? Drinking champagne? (In the afternoon you drank wine in Grunewald?[127] Surely not?) I wanted to stay at my desk and go on with my novel (which today is still suffering from yesterday’s interruption), but now I have had an invitation from people I am very fond of (that Dr. Weltsch’s uncle’s family), so I am in two minds about what I should do; in the end I shall stay at home I think, even though—since I have had your little case—I am now capable of appearing at any

social function (hand in pocket, case in hand). But the loss of time would be too bad, I would regret it, and moreover unfamiliar twitchings and muscular contortions in my head warn me against excessively long night vigils.

Now, dearest, adieu, a happy New Year to my dearest girl; a new year must be a different year, and if the old one has kept us apart, perhaps the new year, with miraculous forces, will throw us together. Throw, throw, New Year!

Franz

From December 31, 1912, to January 1, 1913

While I was still lying in bed this evening at 8, not tired, not rested, but incapable of getting up, depressed by this general New Year's Eve celebration that was beginning all around; while I lay there sadly, like a lost dog, the two possibilities I had of spending the evening with good friends (just now the midnight cannon went off, shouting in the streets and on the bridge, where I don't really see anyone, ringing of bells, striking of clocks) made me feel so much more desperate and withdrawn that I felt the proper task for my gaze was the scanning of my bedroom ceiling, and then it occurred to me how glad I ought to be that misfortune decrees I cannot be with you. I would have to pay too dearly for the joy of seeing you, the joy of our first conversation, the joy of hiding my face in your lap—for all this I would have to pay too dearly, you would run away from me, no doubt run away crying, for you are kindness itself; that is how I would pay for it, but what good would the tears do me? And would I have the right to run after you? Would I, I who am devoted to you like no other, have the right to do it? (How they roar in the streets, even in this district so far from any main thoroughfare!) But I need not answer all this myself; you, dearest, you answer—but do so after very careful consideration, leaving no room for doubt. I am starting with the most trivial, most insignificant questions; as time passes I shall intensify them.

Let us assume that by some special stroke of luck it were possible for us to spend some days together in the same town—Frankfurt perhaps. On the second evening we have arranged to go to the theater, and I am supposed to fetch you from the exhibition. Hastily and with the greatest difficulty you have disposed of important matters to make quite sure of being on time, and now you are waiting for me. You wait in vain, I don't arrive; a purely accidental delay can no longer be assumed, the time limit conceded even by the most amiable person is long past. Nor do you receive a message that might explain; meanwhile you could have disposed of your business matters with the greatest care, would have had time to change; in any case it will now be too late for the theater. You can't imagine that it was sheer neglect on my part; perhaps you are a little worried that something may have happened to me, and on the spur of the moment—I can hear you giving the driver his instructions—you go to my hotel and get them to show you to my room. And what do you find? I am still lying (I am now copying the first page of this letter) in bed at 8, not tired, not rested; I maintain that I had been incapable of leaving my bed, complain about everything and insinuate even worse complaints; I try to make amends for the terrible wrong by stroking your hand, by seeking your eyes, lost in the dark room, and yet my whole behavior shows that I am quite prepared to repeat the whole thing at any moment. Although I am at a loss to explain myself in words, I am aware of our situation in every detail, and if I were in your place, standing at my bedside, I wouldn't hesitate to raise my umbrella and in my anger and despair break it over my head.

Don't forget, dearest: the incident I have just described is absolutely impossible in reality. In Frankfurt, for instance, if my continuous presence in the exhibition halls were prohibited, I would simply spend all day squatting outside the entrance to the exhibition, and when visiting the theater together I would probably behave in a similar fashion—in other words, be overattentive rather than negligent. But I want a more than plain answer to my question, an answer that is absolutely independent from every point of view, even from that of reality, and that's why I have put my question in

more than plain terms. So answer, dearest pupil, answer your teacher who at times in the immensity of his love and his unhappiness would like to vanish utterly into unreality.

In your last letter there is a sentence you have written once before, and so have I: “We belong together unconditionally.” That, dearest, is true a thousandfold; now, for instance, in these first hours of the New Year I could have no greater and no crazier wish than that we should be bound together inseparably by the wrists of your left and my right hand. I don’t quite know why this should occur to me; perhaps because a book on the French Revolution, with contemporary accounts, is lying in front of me, and it may be possible after all—not that I have read or heard of it anywhere—that a couple thus bound together were once led to the scaffold.—But what is all this that’s racing through my head which, by the way, has remained completely closed to my poor novel today? That’s the 13 in the new year’s date. But the finest 13 won’t prevent me from drawing you, my dearest, closer, closer, closer to me. Where are you at this moment? From whose company am I drawing you away?

Franz

December [January] 1, 1912 [1913]

Dearest, just a few words on New Year’s afternoon. Do you know my greatest worry at the moment? I didn’t get your long wonderful letter intended for yesterday, Tuesday, until the second mail today, Wednesday. Now you write: “But you are sure to get yet another letter on Sunday morning,” and when you say Sunday you clearly mean today, New Year’s Day. All right, but I did not get that second letter, it wasn’t at the office either. So it will probably arrive at the apartment tomorrow while I am at the office. Well, I will leave instructions for it to be brought to the office at once, but will they forget, will it be brought in time, will yet another letter arrive at the office? So there, dearest, these are my worries. Damn the mail! Damn the distance!

But how well you treat me in today's letter! How good of you to forgive me, and how well you understand my worries! But for this I will thank you properly tonight. Dearest, adieu, I have an attack of my great, heavy, idiotic afternoon-head with a slight twitching above the left eye, and in this condition I have to go and meet people. But why not? I shall still be good enough for them, for even when I am relatively at my best, I still don't belong to them.

Eulenberg's dismissal pleases me enormously, and the man hasn't the slightest inkling about it; instead, he is pleased about his Schiller Prize[1] and the 12,000 marks which, according to Werfel, he receives annually from Rowohlt. I don't begrudge him this in any way, because I have drawn you, Felice, over to my side. But now you must stay there!

Franz

January 2, 1913

But this is quite incomprehensible to me, dearest; I was just about to get into bed when your telegram arrived. What is the Berlin mail up to? On New Year's Day you got a letter at home, didn't you? All right, on New Year's Eve I wrote you a gigantic letter and mailed it on the morning of New Year's Day; it should arrive today, the 2nd, at 9 o'clock. And then, in my joy over your letter, I wrote another during the afternoon of New Year's Day and mailed it at once; that one should arrive today at 10 o'clock. Finally last night I wrote another letter which should arrive tomorrow, the 3rd, at 9. You see, dearest, I am in no way to blame. My mail is quite crazy too; your letters of the 30th and the 31st didn't arrive till today, the 2nd; your New Year's Eve postcard on the other hand arrived punctually at the office. Why are we persecuted in this way? Are we so superlatively happy in every other way? I must hurry now to mail this letter express.

Franz

From January 2 to 3, 1913

Very late, my poor, persecuted dearest. After not too bad but far too brief a spell of work, I sat leaning back in my chair again for a long time, and now it has become very late.

I don't know, I can't take the nonarrival of my letters so very seriously, even though your telegram is here before me, which makes me long to race to Berlin and explain the matter quickly and by word of mouth. But the letters must surely have arrived during the course of the afternoon. How is it possible that two letters, no doubt correctly addressed, furnished moreover with the sender's name and address, and in spite of being conveyed in different mailbags, could be lost on the same day? This is quite beyond me. If in fact it has happened, one can no longer be sure of anything, all letters will start getting lost again, including this one, and only a telegram will reach its destination. And then we will have but one way out: throw away our pens and hurry toward each other.

Dearest, whatever happens I implore you, with hands raised in supplication, not to be jealous of my novel. If the people in my novel get wind of your jealousy, they will run away from me; as it is, I am holding on to them only by the ends of their sleeves. And imagine, if they run away from me I shall have to run after them, even as far as the underworld, where of course they really are at home. The novel is me, my stories are me—where, I ask you, would there be the tiniest corner for jealousy? In any case, when everything else goes well, all my characters come running arm in arm toward you, ultimately to serve you alone. I would certainly not detach myself from my novel even in your presence; it wouldn't do me any good if I could, for it is through writing that I keep a hold on life, keep a hold on that boat in which you, Felice, are standing.[2] Sad enough that I don't seem quite able to pull myself in. But bear in mind, dearest Felice, once I lose my writing, I am bound to lose you and everything else.

Don't worry about my book [*Meditation*]; all that talk the other day was a sad evening's sad mood.[3] At the time I thought the best way of making my book agreeable to you was to level some silly

reproaches against you. Do read it quietly some time. After all, how can it remain alien to you! Even if you were to shrink from it, it should draw you to itself, provided it is my able envoy.

Franz

[IN THE MARGINS] I don't really know which of the letters is supposed to be lost, the one about Napoleon and the children, or the one about Frankfurt?

Woe to you, dearest, should you ever get up at night to write, woe to you!

With which of your colleagues did you hurry home on the 30th?

A question of jealousy: What does your father have to say about [Brod's] *Arnold Beer*?

From January 3 to 4, 1913

I know, dearest, I ought not to have stopped writing yet, I know I have stopped too soon; it is barely past 1 o'clock, but my reluctance was a fraction greater than my inclination, albeit the inclination was great, albeit it was weakness rather than reluctance, and so I gave up. Please, dearest, when you have read this, give me a nod, to prove that I did the right thing, and then it will have been the right thing to have done.

I believe we barter our anxieties. Today I was the anxious one. I would have liked to know whether you finally got my letters. There were moments today when I thought I wouldn't be able to bear the next moment unless it brought you to me. Late last night, after I had written and sealed the last letter, it occurred to me in bed that the whole business of my undelivered letters can only be explained by the fact that one of your little office ladies hid the letters, out of curiosity and lewdness, and failed to hand them to you until the evening. I wonder if I have guessed right.

Your bet for a bottle of champagne amazed me. Because I too, though years ago, and as far as I remember for a period of ten years,

made a similar bet with a friend concerning my marriage. I even gave him a written pledge, which he still holds. I never would have thought of it if this friend, just recently—after not having mentioned it for years—hadn't chanced to remind me of it. It was also a question of champagne, but unless I am mistaken, 10 bottles of the very best. I probably thought at the time that 10 years hence I would organize a pleasant bachelor evening, hoping that with the years I might also acquire a taste for champagne, something which so far has not happened. The bet originated, as you will have guessed, in those far off, so-called gadabout days, when I spent many a night sitting in taverns, without drinking. Judging by the names, they were wonderful places: Trocadero, Eldorado, and so forth. And now? Now at night I stand on the street of an American town pouring strange beverages into myself, as into a barrel.[4]

You still want me to tell you that old dream? Why particularly the old one when I dream about you almost every night? Just imagine, last night I celebrated my engagement to you. It looked terribly, terribly improbable, and I no longer remember much about it. The whole party sat in a room in semidarkness at a long wooden table, its black top not covered by any kind of cloth. I sat at the lower end of the table between strangers; you were standing up, rather far away from me further up, diagonally opposite me. My longing for you made me lay my head on the table and peer across at you. Your eyes, directed toward me, were dark, but in the center of each eye there was a spot that shone like fire and gold. Then my dream became diffused; I noticed how the servant girl behind the guests' backs sampled the semiliquid dish she was to hand around in a small brown pot, and put the spoon back into the dish. This sent me into an awful rage, and I led the girl—it now turned out that the whole scene was taking place in a hotel, and that the girl was one of the hotel employees—down to the hotel's immense business offices where I lodged a complaint with the appropriate authorities about the girl's behavior, but without much success. Then the dream lapsed into tremendous journeys and tremendous haste. What do you think of that? Actually, the old dream is even clearer in my mind than this one, but I won't describe it to you today.

At the risk of ruining your Sunday, I am sending you my most recent photograph, and 3 copies at that, since I think I have discovered that in larger quantities it loses some of its horror. I don't know what to do, flashlights always give me a mad look—the face twisted, the eyes crossed and staring. Don't worry, dearest, I don't look like that, this picture doesn't count, it isn't one you should carry around with you, I'll send you a better one soon. In reality I am at least twice as beautiful as in this picture. If that's not enough for you, dearest, then things are indeed serious. In that case, what am I to do? However, you do have a fairly true picture of me; the way I look in the little book [*Meditation*] is how I really look, at least that's how I looked a short while ago. And whether you like it or not, I belong to you.

Franz

From January 5 to 6, 1913

[Presumably during the night of January 4 to 5, 1913]

Once again worked badly, very badly, dearest! It's terrible that it cannot be held on to for any length of time; it just writhes like a living thing between one's fingers!

Just imagine, now one can no longer rely even on express letters; your express letter didn't arrive at the office until yesterday evening; as a result, I didn't get it until this morning. This is the kind of letter that quickens one's step up the stairs, and upstairs makes one stand close to the window with it (at 8:15 it is still quite dark), and for all those who consider this kind of letter reading a reason for gathering around and asking questions, one has, even over the most doubtful matters, an affirmative nod, free from all worries.

And then the second letter arrived, and we were in Frankfurt together and embraced each other, rather than the emptiness in the room, as hitherto. But dearest, you slightly blunted the nasty point of my question. If we are treating it as a game, we must play the game to the end; you really must know me at my worst as well as at my best; it is easier for me, you invariably dear and good one!

To tell the truth, at this very moment I am in an intolerable state, and the only good thing about me is that I am angry with myself. I have written badly, and as a result am seized by a kind of numbness. I am not tired, not sleepy, not sad, not cheerful; I haven't the strength to bring you here with my thoughts, although on my right there happens to be an empty chair, as though ready for you; I am in the grip of something, and cannot free myself.

And this, for example, is just how it would be in our Frankfurt affair. Nothing would have happened to me, as you rightly suppose; absolutely nothing would have happened to me; I would just lie quietly in my bed while according to the clock on the chair by my bed the moment for our appointment would approach, arrive, and pass. I would have no excuse, I would have nothing to say, I would just feel guilty. The impression I would make on you in this state would be similar to that which some of my letters make upon you, the ones to which your reply begins with the question: "Now, Franz, what am I to do with you?"

Do I torment you with my obstinacy? Yet how else but through obstinacy can the obstinate make sure of his incredible good fortune which, sent from heaven, came to him on a certain August evening?

Franz

I don't know whether you go to the office on Epiphany, which is why I am sending this letter to your home; tomorrow I will write another to your office.

January 5, 1913

Only a few words, my poor dearest one! It is dizzily late; if I am still to send you Sunday greetings, it will have to be done with lightning speed. All I have in mind is to embrace you, not only for myself, but also to let you know about it. But—it has just occurred to me—perhaps the reason why we don't get together is that I would have the overwhelming desire to kiss you at once; whereupon I declare

before the Powers on High that to begin with I would be quite content, my poor dearest one, to be allowed to stroke your hand.

Franz

From January 5 to 6, 1913

Poor, poor dearest, may you never feel compelled to read this miserable novel I keep writing away at so dismally. It is terrible how it can change its appearance; once the load (the ardor I write with! How the inkspots fly!) is on the cart, I am all right; I delight in cracking the whip and am a man of importance; but once it falls off the cart (which cannot be foreseen, prevented, or concealed), as it did yesterday and today, then it feels excessively heavy for my pitiful shoulders; all I want to do then is abandon everything and dig my grave on the spot. After all, there can be no more beautiful spot to die in, no spot more worthy of total despair, than one's own novel. At this moment two people—grown somewhat dim since yesterday—are talking to each other on two adjacent balconies on the 8th floor at 3 in the morning.[5] How would it be if I called out "goodbye" to them from the street, and abandoned them completely? They would collapse there on their balconies and with corpselike expressions stare at each other through the railings. But I am only threatening, dearest, I won't really do it. If—no if, once again I'm going astray.

Today I really tried to sleep in the afternoon, but it didn't turn out too well because next door—I hadn't thought of it beforehand—the 600–700 invitations to my sister's wedding, which is to take place next Sunday, were being made ready, and my future brother-in-law, who is in charge of this operation, has, notwithstanding his many attractive qualities, a voice so piercing and so readily exercised that anyone trying to sleep in an adjoining room has, at the sound of this voice, the sensation that a saw has been placed at his throat. Of course, under these circumstances one doesn't sleep very well; it was a constant starting up and dropping back to sleep. And in order to sleep, I had foregone a lovely walk. But in the end I did get

enough sleep, and it cannot be used as an excuse for my bad writing.

What about the remarks, dearest, your parents made about me? On this subject I want to know every word and every gesture. Come now, how long you keep these things from me! When I hear of such remarks, I get such a sense of your nearness; whether happy or sad, it is so intense and so desirable to me, who is so completely shut out from your physical nearness, that lost in its joys I can stare for ages at such information without reading, without thinking, without feeling anything other than you. Then I am close beside you; when your parents address you they are addressing me, and I am part of the blood cycle from which you spring. Perhaps there is no greater nearness, the next step would be actual permeation.

Nor have we quite finished, Felice, with that “rather nice-looking” pediatrician. I am going to hold on to him for a little while yet; he is a minor counterpart to the Frankfurt affair, and in fact basically, even though unintentionally, a question put to me. I have to answer it. If I were only jealous, dearest, nothing other than jealous, then after your account I could become more jealous still. For if this pediatrician was of such importance that it meant telling an untruth to protect yourself from him, then—— But dearest, this is the reasoning of one who is jealous, not mine, though I may be able to entertain it. My reasoning is this: You got on well with the doctor, you spent a pleasant evening with him, he tried to establish a relationship, and by and large—at least to the point of a short morning meeting—that would not have been unwelcome, either to you or to your mother; it seems that owing to your refusal of this relationship any further relationship is now impossible or at least improbable, and for that, according to your account, Felice, I alone am responsible, and indeed I have every right to be. And how do I bear this responsibility? With pride, or satisfaction, or to attract further responsibility? No, I complain, I actually moan; I would have liked the doctor to have come up to see you and your parents, to have continued to prove himself the nice man he was on New Year’s Eve, to have been gay and been gaily received. For who am I to dare get in his way? A shadow who loves you infinitely, but who cannot

be drawn into the light. Shame on me!—Now of course the time has come to let the whirl spin in the opposite direction. I would be consumed with jealousy were I to hear from afar that the doctor in fact succeeded in everything I have so urgently wished him on the preceding page, and the untruth you told him came not from your true self, but was spoken from within me, and I would almost like to think that at that moment your voice had about it a faint ring of mine.—But how does this view accord with the earlier one? (So once again my answer turns into nothing but a question put to you.) Only as a whirl. And is it possible for me to be pulled out of this whirl? That I cannot believe.

Besides, I know from my nature cures that all dangers stem from medicine, no matter whether it be an oculist, a dentist, or a pediatrician. This stupid pen! What stupidities will it not shrink from putting down on paper instead of writing something sensible for once, such as “Dearest one!” and then again “Dearest one!” and nothing else.

My thinking about you is more sensible than my writing to you. Last night I couldn’t and wouldn’t go to sleep for a long time, and for two hours I lay there more awake than asleep, continuously in a most intimate conversation with you. Nothing particular was discussed or explained, it was simply a form of intimate conversation, the feeling of nearness and devotion.

Franz

From January 6 to 7, 1913

Don’t laugh, dearest, don’t laugh, at this moment I feel terribly serious about my wish: If only you were here! As a kind of game I often work out how many hours—in the fastest possible way, under the best possible conditions—it would take me to reach you, how many hours for you to reach me. It is always too long, far too long, so desperately long that even if it weren’t for other obstacles, one could not decide on the attempt, simply on account of the time it would take. This evening I went straight from home to the house on

Ferdinandstrasse where your agent has his office. It almost looked as though I had a rendezvous with you there. But I walked around the house alone, and alone I went away again. I could not even find a mention of the firm of Lindström among the nameplates: The man calls himself simply general agent for a gramophone company. Why? I often complain about the paucity of localities in Prague that have, at least to my knowledge, any association with you. The Brods' apartment, Schalengasse, Kohlenmarkt, Perlgasse, Obstgasse, the Graben. And then there's the café in the Repräsentationshaus,[6] the breakfast room at the Blaue Stern and the vestibule. Very few, dearest, but how these few stand out for me on the city map!

I have so much to say to you today in answer to both your letters that if your mother were able to see it she would have to speculate like this: How is it possible to write at all if one has so much to say and knows that the pen can only trace an uncertain and random trail through the mass of what has to be said?

So you put my picture into your little heart (not heart, presumptuous me!) in your locket as an uncomfortable neighbor to your little niece and, if I have read correctly, you intend to wear it night and day? Didn't you feel tempted to throw away that bad picture? Don't you find my stare too frightening? Does it deserve the honor you bestow on it? To think that my picture is tucked in your locket while I sit here all alone in my freezing cold room (where to my great shame I seem to have caught a cold just lately)! But just you wait, you bad photograph, it will be a blessed moment when I arrive and with my own hand take you out of the locket. But I won't throw you away if only on account of the glances Felice may have wasted on you.

I shall stop; it's late, and I could never finish; in any case, what business have my hands to write letters if all they are made for and all they want is to hold you!

Franz

January 7, 1913

My dearest Felice, I am writing to you this afternoon because I don't know whether I shall be able to get out of bed at all tonight. Perhaps I had better sleep right through. I have obviously caught a cold, and what's more I feel chilled through and through; I can't believe it, and yet I have. And if it isn't a cold, it is something devilishly like it. I shall drink hot lemonade, wrap a hot towel around me, withdraw from the world, and dream about Felice. All chills and all ghosts will be driven out of me and my room by heat, to provide a clean abode for my thoughts of you, my dearest child.

I am not to say another word against the mail? Just listen, I got your Sunday evening letter on Monday morning; on the other hand your Sunday morning letter only this morning, Tuesday. (Letters arrive more promptly at the office, our apartment is so remote.) It can only have been on account of your pictures, which the post office begrudges me. Dearest, what a lovely picture! Perhaps not in every detail, but the expression, the smile, and the pose! Something useless is gnawing in my head, but it stops for a moment when I look at your picture. Now I see you more or less as I saw you that first time. I no longer remember this position of your hands, but I think it is coming back to my mind. Your friendly expression is really meant for the world at large (just as my staring eyes are for the world at large), but I am taking it as meant for me, and am happy.

Please, dearest, don't give a single thought to my cold. I mention it only because I like telling you every little detail, as is natural when the other's face is as close as it should be in reality, but only occasionally is in dreams. In any case, ever since my childhood a minor, fleeting illness has always been a much coveted but rarely achieved pleasure. It breaks the inexorable passage of time, and bestows on this worn-out, dragged-along being that one is a minor rebirth, which I am now really beginning to crave. And it may be only so that you, Felice, should have a more lovable letter writer, who is at last beginning to realize that you are too precious to be constantly harried by complaints.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] 7:45 A.M. The treatment is over; off to the office.

From January 8 to 9, 1912 [1913]

Today for various reasons, instead of writing, I went for a walk with that Dr. Weltsch, after spending an hour and a half in the midst of his family, listening to his father, an intelligent man, interested in everything—he owns a small drapery business—telling many beautiful stories of the old Prague ghetto at the time of his grandfather, who owned a large drapery business. I felt the need to be with strangers, and yet did not feel at ease in their company. In this predicament I can never look steadily at the person who is talking to me; my eyes, if I let them, wander from the stranger's face; and if I resist, then of course it is no longer a steady look, but a stare. But do I really want to describe the whole evening? No, but from the immense tangle of all there is to say, the slightly dulled mind produces only the arbitrary and the trivial. Actually it seems as though in the last few days I have told you so little and answered so few of even the most urgent things that I sometimes have the feeling I am about to lose your attention. This must not happen, Felice. Don't misinterpret my failure to answer particular questions, don't hold it against me; these waves that carry me along are dark, muddy, heavy water; I advance slowly, and sometimes get stuck, but then am swept forward again, and all goes fairly well. This you must surely have noticed during our first three months.

I can also laugh, Felice, have no doubt about this; I am even known as a great laugher, although in this respect I used to be far crazier than I am now. It even happened to me once, at a solemn meeting with our president—it was two years ago, but the story will outlive me at the office—that I started to laugh, and how! It would be too involved to describe to you this man's importance; but believe me, it is very great: an ordinary employee thinks of this man as not on this earth, but in the clouds. And as we usually have little opportunity of talking to the Emperor, contact with this man is for the average clerk—a situation common of course to all large

organizations—tantamount to meeting the Emperor. Needless to say, like anyone exposed to clear and general scrutiny whose position does not quite correspond to his achievements, this man invites ridicule; but to allow oneself to be carried away by laughter at something so commonplace and, what's more, in the presence of the great man himself, one must be out of one's mind. At that time we, two colleagues and I, had just been promoted, and in our formal black suits had to express our thanks to the president—here I must not forget to add that for a special reason I owed the president[7] special gratitude. The most dignified of us (I was the youngest) made the speech of thanks—short, sensible, dashing, in accordance with his character. The president listened in his usual posture adopted for solemn occasions, somewhat reminiscent of our Emperor when giving audience—which, if one happens to be in a certain mood, is a terribly funny pose. Legs lightly crossed, left hand clenched and resting on the very corner of the table, head lowered so that the long white beard curves on his chest, and, on top of all this, his not excessively large but nevertheless protruding stomach gently swaying. I must have been in a very uncontrolled mood at the time, for I knew this posture well enough, and it was quite unreasonable for me to be attacked by fits of the giggles (albeit with interruptions), which so far however could easily be taken as due to a tickle in the throat, especially as the president did not look up. My colleague's clear voice, eyes fixed straight ahead—he was no doubt aware of my condition, without being affected by it—still kept me in check. But at the end of my colleague's speech the president raised his head, and then for a moment I was seized with terror, without laughter, for now he could see my expression and easily ascertain that the sound unfortunately escaping from my mouth was definitely not a cough. But when he began his speech, again the usual one, all too familiar, in the imperial mold, delivered with great conviction, a totally meaningless and unnecessary speech; and when my colleague with sidelong glances tried to warn me (I was doing everything in my power to control myself), and in so doing reminded me vividly of the joys of my earlier laughter, I could no longer restrain myself and all hope that I should ever be able to do

so vanished. At first I laughed only at the president's occasional delicate little jokes; but while it is a rule only to contort one's features respectfully at these little jokes, I was already laughing out loud; observing my colleagues' alarm at being infected by it, I felt more sorry for them than for myself, but I couldn't help it; I didn't even try to avert or cover my face, but in my helplessness continued to stare straight at the president, incapable of turning my head, probably on the instinctive assumption that everything could only get worse rather than better, and that therefore it would be best to avoid any change. And now that I was in full spate, I was of course laughing not only at the current jokes, but at those of the past and the future and the whole lot together, and by then no one knew what I was really laughing about. A general embarrassment set in; only the president remained relatively unconcerned, as behooves a great man accustomed to the ways of the world and to whom the possibility of irreverence toward his person would not even occur. Had we been able to slip out at this moment (the president had evidently shortened his speech a little), everything might still have gone fairly well; no doubt my behavior would have remained discourteous, but this discourtesy would not have been mentioned, and the whole affair, as sometimes happens with apparently impossible situations, might have been dealt with by a conspiracy of silence between the four of us. But unfortunately my colleague, the one hitherto unmentioned (a man close to 40, a heavy beer drinker with a round, childish, but bearded face), started to make a totally unexpected little speech. At that moment this struck me as quite incomprehensible; my laughter had made him lose his composure, he had stood there with cheeks blown out with suppressed laughter —and now he embarked on a serious speech. Actually this was quite consistent with his character. Empty-headed and impetuous, he is capable of defending generally accepted statements, passionately and at length, and the boredom of this kind of speech, without the absurd but engaging passion, would be intolerable. Now, the president in all innocence had said something to which this colleague of mine took exception. In addition, influenced by my continuous laughter, he may have forgotten where he was; in short,

he assumed the moment had come to air his particular views and to convince the president (a man utterly indifferent to other people's opinions). So now, as he started to hold forth, brandishing his arms, about something absurdly childish (even in general, but here in particular), it was too much for me: the world, the semblance of the world which hitherto I had seen before me, dissolved completely, and I burst into loud and uninhibited laughter of such heartiness as perhaps only schoolchildren at their desks are capable of. A silence fell, and now at last my laughter and I were the acknowledged center of attention. While I laughed my knees of course shook with fear, and my colleagues on their part could join in to their hearts' content, but they could never match the full horror of my long-rehearsed and -practiced laughter, and thus they remained comparatively unnoticed. Beating my breast with my right hand, partly in awareness of my sin (remembering the Day of Atonement), and partly to drive out all the suppressed laughter, I produced innumerable excuses for my behavior, all of which might have been very convincing had not the renewed outbursts of laughter rendered them completely unintelligible. By now of course even the president was disconcerted; and in a manner typical only of people born with an instinct for smoothing things out, he found some phrase that offered some reasonable explanation for my howls—I think an allusion to a joke he had made a long time before. He then hastily dismissed us. Undefeated, roaring with laughter yet desperately unhappy, I was the first to stagger out of the hall.—By writing a letter to the president immediately afterwards and through the good offices of one of the president's sons whom I know well, and thanks also to the passage of time, the whole thing calmed down considerably. Needless to say, I did not achieve complete absolution, nor shall I ever achieve it. But this matters little; I may have behaved in this fashion at the time simply in order to prove to you later that I am capable of laughter.

Well now—and so my old offense against the president takes its revenge once again—I have written so much, yet nothing. But just a few answers in great haste before going to bed: *Intensity of Feeling* of course belongs to you, entirely to you. The dedication "as a friend"

is meant explicitly for you; I hope you accept it? (I of course have another dedication copy.) And if the dedication has a slight double meaning (which in fact it hasn't, but which I am now insinuating), it is that Max is also a friend of mine, that this dedication therefore gives me an opportunity of coming very close to you (I want to make use of even the slightest opportunity of coming close to you), would that be so bad?

No, it is really too late to continue. I am enclosing a heller I found today on my evening walk. I was just complaining about something (there is nothing I couldn't complain about), and in my discontent I put my foot down hard, and with the tip of my toe kicked up this heller on the pavement. These hellers are lucky, but I need no luck that is not also yours, so I send it to you. Isn't my finding it as good as if you had found it?

Franz

From January 10 to 11, 1913

[Probably from January 9 to 10, 1913]

My dearest, only a few words today, it is late, I am tired, have been disturbed this afternoon, and indeed will be for another few days. I shall have to leave my writing—which I don't want assailed by any disturbance (it suffers more than enough as it is from inner disturbances)—for a week, perhaps even longer; the only compensation will be more sleep; it won't be enough, but anything I write today doesn't count at all because bed is definitely where I now belong, but apart from this I also definitely belong to you, thus I vacillate between the two of you.

My poor dearest writing sales letters! Do I get one too, though I'm not a buyer? Although, if anything, I am fundamentally frightened of Parlographs? A machine with its silent, serious demands strikes me as exercising a greater, more cruel compulsion on one's capacities than any human being. How insignificant, how easy to control, to send away, to shout down, upbraid, question, or stare at, a living typist is! He who dictates is master, but faced with a

Parlograph he is degraded and becomes a factory worker whose brain has to serve a whirring machine. Think how a long chain of thought is forced out of the poor, naturally slow-working brain! You're lucky, dearest, not to have to reply to these objections in your sales letter; they are irrefutable. That the speed of the machine is easy to regulate, that one can put it away when one doesn't feel like dictating, etc., is no refutation of this argument, for the fact that all this does not help is part of the nature of the man who makes these objections. What I noticed about your prospectus was that it is worded with great pride; there is no begging such as one finds in similar circulars issued by Austrian factories, nor is there any excessive praise. I'm not joking when I say that it reminded me—not, of course, by its wording or its subject matter or its style—of Strindberg, whom I hardly know but have always loved in a very special way; strange that my first letters should have reached you when you were under the spell of *The Dance of Death* and *The Gothic Room*. Before long I must tell you something about the "Memories of Strindberg"[8] that appeared not long ago in the *Neue Rundschau*; their effect upon me was to make me run around my room one Sunday morning like a lunatic.

Tomorrow or the day after you will get the calendar and Flaubert. The calendar, which I've only just received, is not nearly as nice as I had imagined, and so if I were to tear off a page a day, fold it, and send it to you, it would be nothing to be proud of. But since the calendar is here and I want neither to give away nor let anyone see something that was meant for you, I'll send it to you after all. Hang it up in some corner! The beauty to balance its ugliness is supplied by Flaubert, whom I really (unnecessary assertion!) would like to have placed into your hands myself.

That's that, but now I am hot-foot off to bed; my words are on their way to you, your thoughts drawn to me, and I am content.

Don't you overexert yourself writing to me, dearest? A single line from you gives me so much pleasure that five lines cannot give me more.

Franz

Above all, dearest, no self-reproaches about not writing enough! You write far too much for the little time you have, far too much!

As long as you keep to the lovely regularity of writing every day, as you have recently, I have no further wishes as far as writing is concerned, and since other wishes are unattainable at the moment, or forever, all is well, even if not as well as it should be.

That I should be sitting down at my desk to write to you immediately after the final words with my family, instead of doing my writing first (as I always used to do) and so finding myself on a higher level—either of happiness or unhappiness—this worries me. It must not continue for long; Monday I think I shall start to write again; many stories, dearest, are drumming their marching tunes in my head.

And yet I sometimes writhe with grief, for which there are indeed all kinds of reasons. Not the least of it is the witnessing of these two engagements, Max's and my sister's. In bed today I complained to you about these two engagements in a long speech which to you no doubt would have seemed a well-argued one; now I certainly won't be able to recollect all that ought to be said, so perhaps I had better leave it. You have no idea of the speeches I make to you in bed! Lying on my back, my feet pressed against the bedposts, on I go, quietly talking away to myself for my favorite listener! We have such very different talents. In bed I am the great orator, you in bed the great letter writer. How do you do it? You still haven't described to me how this letter writing in bed is done.

I am not satisfied with either of these engagements, and yet I strongly encouraged and perhaps helped to persuade Max to get engaged; and I certainly never dissuaded my sister from getting engaged. However, as my married sister's [Elli's] marriage shows, I am a bad prophet and judge of human nature; I felt the same hopelessness at her engagement; yet this sister, who used to be an awkward, permanently dissatisfied, morose, and fidgety girl, has now by her marriage, in her happiness with her two children, truly extended her being.[9] But even so I cannot mistrust my knowledge of

human nature; I don't feel that facts have proved it wrong, so it must have some deeper truth, although this may mean that I give my so-called knowledge of human nature simply the appearance of a deep-seated, obdurate stupidity. And besides—why do I suffer in this strange way from these engagements as though an immediate and direct disaster had befallen me, when all possible misgivings can only apply to the future; when those chiefly concerned are unexpectedly happy (could it be that I am hurt by this unexpectedness?); and finally when I myself, personally and directly, take hardly any part in these engagement and wedding matters? (Last night, without a trace of malice, without any reference to my colossal lack of participation, simply as a pointless joke, my future brother-in-law said, "Good evening, Franz! How are you? What news from home?" This manner of speech, if you like, made sense.)

In fact, however, I am involved; I can feel the two strange families pressing upon me, my brother-in-law's family is even being forced upon my own family.——

No, I won't write any more today, it would not sound very convincing at the moment; perhaps you have some idea of what I mean on the whole, but unfortunately you cannot understand it from a distance in detail, and that's the most important.

At the very moment you read this letter I may be driving to the synagogue—wearing my old tailcoat, cracked patent-leather shoes, a top hat far too small for me, and with an unusually pale* face (because nowadays I always take so long to get to sleep) in my position as an usher sitting next to a pleasant, pretty, elegant, and above all very considerate and modest cousin—where the marriage will be solemnized with that tremendous solemnity that upsets me every time. Because the Jewish public in general, here at any rate, have limited the religious ceremonies to weddings and funerals, these two occasions have drawn grimly close to each other, and one can virtually see the reproachful glances of a withering faith.

Goodnight, my dearest. How glad I am that for once at least your Sunday is bound to be quieter than mine. I wonder with what remark your mother will hand you this letter?

Franz

I read your letter again and since it has made me wonder about several things I just want to ask you the following questions:

1. What is the meaning of: I haven't detached the locket yet.
2. Who were the friends you went with? God knows why, but names make everything clear to me.
3. What was it like at the mixed baths? Alas, this is where I have to suppress a remark (it refers to my appearance in the bath, my thinness).† In the bath I look like an orphan. Once, years ago, we spent the summer vacation on the Elbe; it was a very hot summer; river-bathing was especially pleasant. But the bathing establishment was very small, men and women bathed together, I don't even remember if it had separate cabins; anyway, the people in that resort were very gay and enjoyed themselves. But not I; now and then I ventured among the women, but rarely; most of the time—my desire to bathe was of course constant and immense—I roamed around alone, like a lost dog, keeping to the narrowest paths that ran on the hills alongside the river, watching the small bathing establishment for hours in the hope that it would at last be cleared and accessible to me. How I cursed the latecomers, who suddenly crowded the empty pool again! How I used to moan when it had been exceptionally hot and everyone had enjoyed bathing, and then a great thunderstorm broke and deprived me of all hope of a swim. As a rule I could bathe only toward evening, but by then the air was cool and the pleasure no longer quite as great. Just occasionally a kind of sunstroke made me reckless, and I would take the overcrowded bathing establishment by storm. Then I could bathe in peace and play with the others; no one paid any attention to the little boy, but I couldn't believe it.
4. Some time I should like to hear more about your father.

But listen, now it is late again. And I still haven't prepared any entertainment for this wedding feast, and what's worse, I really can't and I won't.

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, January 11, 1913]

Wedding!
Wedding!
These greetings
only.

F.K.

From January 11 to 12, 1913

Just now, dearest, I have been racking my brains to find, if nothing better, then at least three sentences with which to greet the wedding guests. At last I've got them, they are dismal. Oh, if I were allowed to make a speech against the guests, I shouldn't have to prepare it, it would flow with swift coherence, and I would venture to chase the majority of guests out of the room, not by abuse, but by the expression of my genuine and alarming emotions. As it is, I am condemned to chase myself away; it won't be I who will be sitting there at the table, getting to my feet, uttering the three schoolboy sentences and raising my glass—all this will be done by my other self of the mournful countenance.

But I really didn't mean to tell you all that, I am really writing out of fear. Listen! Wasn't there something in my last letter that could have upset, hurt, or even offended you? The thought of it chokes me. But I am not even sure, for now that I am not writing for myself I feel as though I had relinquished the measure for such things. Perhaps there was nothing offensive in that passage after all, but I had an uncomfortable feeling even while writing it down, and now it strikes me all at once as brutal and cold and inconsiderate and

rude. In any case, dearest, for my peace of mind, send the letter back to me—but no, don't send it back. Oh, now I don't even know what I want; what a state I have got myself into! I shall have to climb a long way before I get out of it again. If only I had your reply to my last letter, the one you got on Sunday; perhaps your anger with me over one particular passage drove you out of bed. If you are angry with me, dearest, then forgive me—in my present state it is not shameful to cry for sympathy, it is my state that is shameful—if you have already forgiven me, take this letter as a belated apology; if you have found no guilt whatever on my part, then laugh at me, there's nothing I should like better.

Franz

A charming remark by my youngest sister: As you well know, she loves me very much; blindly she considers everything I say, do, or think, to be good, but at the same time has such a sense of humor of her own that she is capable of laughing both at me and of course at herself (for she is always on my side). Now there isn't a shadow of doubt that I have been saddened by this wedding, so my sister, as a result of her whole attitude to me, has to find some justification for my sadness, though of course she can share my feelings only to a very small degree. Well, this evening while packing Valli's (the bride's) things, our housekeeper began to cry, making Valli cry, too. Valli then came into the living room with tears in her eyes; no sooner has Ottla (my youngest sister) caught sight of those tears than she calls out: "How clever she is, she's crying, too!" This was meant half seriously, half in fun, and implied that crying was right and proper since it was in keeping with my feelings, and so Valli must be clever to express feelings which are so much in keeping with mine.

But now I am going to bed, I don't want to be sleepy tomorrow on top of everything else.

At first I was almost frightened by the man from Cairo. He is sure to be a good German, but I saw him as an Arab draped in a

sheet, chasing you in the empty office. What's the good of my place at your desk! Better to be the night watchman in your factory than so distant a lover as I.

From January 12 to 13, 1913

My dearest child, it is over, prospects of better days are emerging, comparative contentment begins. There are moments when I have the feeling that to have got rid of these strangers no sacrifice was too great, not even the sacrifice of my sister. Of course you must not believe, and indeed you do not believe, that anything factual corresponds to this feeling, but the feeling itself cannot be expelled.

I got your letter, the postcard, and the pictures in the middle of the wedding party, just as we were forming the procession. I felt as though you were squeezing my hand.

Oh, dearest, what nostalgic pleasure these pictures give! They all represent my dearest one; each is different from the others, they all take hold of one by force. In these pictures you again look very much like the little girl in the first picture you sent me. You sit there so quietly, your left hand completely idle, yet it cannot be seized, something requiring thought is being dictated. An ingenious photograph in the event of one having planned to kiss the mouth. Was it taken in your office? What is the difference between the various mouthpieces of the instruments? Perhaps the picture is meant to be used for advertising purposes? Perhaps for picture postcards? But surely not?

Dearest, I wonder what you would have said to me today if you had seen me at the wedding. It really all went off more or less as I expected; the only surprise was that it ever came to an end. But I really hadn't expected to find myself again in this dried-up, head-hanging condition, in which I felt inferior even to the most wretched of guests; I thought I had left such states of mind behind me in the legendary past. But now they were back again, fresh as on the first day of a long chain of unending days. Not until I was alone for a moment in the coffeehouse after it was over, and had seen four

pictures by Daumier (*The Butcher*, *The Concert*, *The Critics*, *The Collector*), did I manage to pull myself together.

Franz

From January 13 to 14, 1913

So you were not angry with me, my clearest Felice, about the Sunday letter and even sacrificed part of your afternoon sleep which you, tenfold overtired, need so badly. Was it at least a deep, sound sleep? But you never go skating, never for a walk? And needless to say you have no time for reading. Before you knew me, this person who lives by and through your letters, you must have had a completely different and far better timetable. Tell me something about it, dearest, but the truth! Nor have I had an explanation for the many periodicals you receive—according to your very first letter.

I would rather not tell you in detail about the wedding; it would mean describing the new relatives and their friends, which would remind me too vividly of the time so recently weathered. My cousin's name is Martha; she has a number of good qualities, among them unpretentiousness, to which alone I addressed myself. My parents (here I cannot resist the temptation to call them "my poor parents") were delighted with the festivities, despite the ridiculous sums which, to their distress, were wasted upon them. Lunch over, my father always sits in his rocking chair for a brief nap, after which he leaves for the shop (he is not allowed to lie down after eating on account of his heart condition). Today he was again sitting in his rocking chair as usual, I thought he had already gone to sleep (I was eating my lunch at the time), when suddenly in his drowsiness he said: "Yesterday someone told me that in her bridal veil Valli looked like a princess." But he said it in Czech, and the love, admiration, and tenderness combined in the word "kněžna" simply cannot be conveyed by "princess"—a word denoting nothing but pomp and circumstance.

Dearest, you slightly misunderstood my brother-in-law's remark. If there were the remotest possibility that my brother-in-law was alluding to your letters, then some malice in his remark could not be denied. But he is the last person to know anything whatever about your letters, and any allusion to them is impossible. The only allusion that could have been (but wasn't) attributed to my brother-in-law, was that I bothered as little about my family as if I were abroad, and kept in touch with them only by letter. So of my true home he knows nothing.

Franz

From January 14 to 15, 1913

Dearest, while I have been writing it has got very late again. At around 2 o'clock every morning I keep remembering the Chinese scholar. Alas, it is not my mistress who calls me, it's only the letter I want to write to her. You once said you would like to sit beside me while I write. Listen, in that case I could not write (I can't do much, anyway), but in that case I could not write at all. For writing means revealing oneself to excess; that utmost of self-revelation and surrender, in which a human being, when involved with others, would feel he was losing himself, and from which, therefore, he will always shrink as long as he is in his right mind—for everyone wants to live as long as he is alive—even that degree of self-revelation and surrender is not enough for writing. Writing that springs from the surface of existence—when there is no other way and the deeper wells have dried up—is nothing, and collapses the moment a truer emotion makes that surface shake. This is why one can never be alone enough when one writes, why there can never be enough silence around one when one writes, why even night is not night enough. This is why there is never enough time at one's disposal, for the roads are long and it is easy to go astray, there are even times when one becomes afraid and has the desire—even without any constraint or enticement—to run back (a desire always severely punished later on), how much more so if one were suddenly to

receive a kiss from the most beloved lips! I have often thought that the best mode of life for me would be to sit in the innermost room of a spacious locked cellar with my writing things and a lamp. Food would be brought and always put down far away from my room, outside the cellar's outermost door. The walk to my food, in my dressing gown, through the vaulted cellars, would be my only exercise. I would then return to my table, eat slowly and with deliberation, then start writing again at once. And how I would write! From what depths I would drag it up! Without effort! For extreme concentration knows no effort. The trouble is that I might not be able to keep it up for long, and at the first failure—which perhaps even in these circumstances could not be avoided—would be bound to end in a grandiose fit of madness. *What do you think, dearest? Don't be reticent with your cellar-dweller.*

Franz

From January 15 to 16, 1913

It is still comparatively early today, but I do want to lie down soon, for I had to pay for yesterday's relatively good work with headaches lasting all day (these headaches are actually an invention of the past two months, if not entirely of the year 1913) and with dreams exploding in my uneasy sleep. It's a long time since I managed to write well on two successive evenings. What a mass of erratic writing this novel will be! Once the first draft is completed, what a difficult, perhaps impossible, task it will be to bring the dead sections at least partially to life! And much that is wrong will have to remain, for no help is forthcoming from out of the depths.

One thing I forgot to ask yesterday, although it kept going around in my head. What is the meaning of you having had a backache during the day and of you not feeling very well when you wrote on Sunday evening? Even on Sunday when you could rest, you didn't feel well? Is this still my healthy girl? And is this my sensible girl who spends the whole of Sunday (so it seems, according to your letter) at home and at her aunt's instead of going out in the lovely

winter air? Tell me about it, dearest, nothing but the truth! I keep hearing your mother's imprecation: "That will be your undoing!" But if by that she only means your writing—and from the context she may mean only your writing—then for once she is wrong. Five lines from my dearest one are enough for me—to reassure her, whisper it in your mother's ear one day while she's asleep after lunch—although five lines may be a tall order, it doesn't make one's "undoing." Granted, if the dearest one writes long letters! But that, Mother, is not my fault; scolding for this reason comes from the depth of my heart, too. But perhaps your mother is not referring to your writing—in which case I don't know what to say.

You once promised to tell me why you can't give up, or at least curtail, your work with the professor. How did you get to the professor in the first place?

I will tell you more about my brother-in-law, also about Max, also about Löwy; after all, it makes no difference to me what I write about; the only thing of value is that with every word I imagine I am touching you, dearest. "Secret Love" is not being played here, but now in the middle of the night our new canary, in spite of being covered up, has started to sing a mournful song.

Franz

January 16, 1913, Thursday afternoon

I am writing now, for who knows how late and how distracted I shall be by the time I get home this evening. Just imagine, this evening I am not—I have seen it coming for a month—staying at home. I am regretting it already, and if I stop regretting it for as much as 15 minutes during the entire evening I shall be satisfied. The thing is that Buber is lecturing on the Jewish Myth;[10] it would take more than Buber to get me out of my room, I have heard him before, I find him dreary; no matter what he says, something is missing. (No doubt he knows a lot, there were some Chinese stories

(I didn't have any blotting paper, and while waiting for the page to dry, I read pages 600–602 of *Education* [*sentimentale*], which

happened to be lying here. Dear God! Read that, dearest, do read it! “Elle avoua qu’elle désirait faire un tour à son bras, dans les rues.” What a sentence! What construction! Dearest, the pages on which so much is crossed out do not represent nights lacking in creative power. These are the very pages that absorbed him completely, in which he vanished from human sight. And even when writing it for the third time he experienced, as you can see in the appendix to this edition, that infinite happiness.[11])
to continue in parentheses: well he, Buber, published *Chinese Ghost and Love Stories*,[12] which are wonderful, at least the ones I know.) But after Buber, Eysoldt[13] will be reading, and it is entirely on her account that I am going. Have you ever heard her? I saw her as Ophelia and as Faith in *Everyman*.[14] I am completely under the spell of her personality and her voice. I probably won’t turn up until after Buber’s lecture.

Yes, dearest, the remark in my Sunday letter. It’s no use, I have to mention it once again. It is very bad, isn’t it? No, your reaction is not at all peculiar. Tell me, how can anything of this sort happen to one? Dearest, I ask you once more to forgive me; speak out, allow no bitterness against me to remain with you; tell me once again explicitly that you have forgiven me, pour ink over the remark and write to say you have done so. I shall breathe a sigh of relief. What demon can have guided my hand at the time!

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Past 3 o’clock, Felice, just imagine. Seen a lot, heard a certain amount, nothing worth sacrificing any sleep for. Goodnight, my dearest. How peacefully you sleep, and he who belongs to you keeps wandering about in the distance. Do you appreciate cards like the enclosed? The naked one in the corner of the picture is Ottla.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] I must have this picture back, I stole it from Ottla.

From January 17 to 18, 1913

After a long time, dearest, I have once more spent a pleasant hour reading. Never would you guess what I read, and what gave me so much pleasure. It was an old set of the *Gartenlaube*[15] from the year 1863. I didn't read anything in particular, but slowly thumbed through 200 pages, looked at the illustrations (at that time still rare on account of the cost of reproduction), and read something of special interest only here and there. Again and again I am drawn into the past, and the pleasure of experiencing human circumstances and ways of thinking in a finished yet still perfectly intelligible manner (God knows, 1863 is only 50 years ago) and yet no longer being capable of absorbing them instinctively in every detail from within, thus being faced with the necessity of toying with them according to one's inclination and mood—for me, this contradictory pleasure is immense. I always like reading old newspapers and periodicals. And then there is this ancient, heart-stirring, expectant Germany of the middle of the last century. The confined conditions, the proximity each felt to the other, editor to subscriber, author to reader, the reader to the great poets of the time (Uhland, Jean Paul, Seume, Rückert—"Germany's Bard and Brahmin"[16]).

I have written nothing today, and the moment I put the book down I am promptly assailed by the insecurity that follows my not writing like an evil spirit. Only a good spirit could drive it away, and it would have to be very close to me and give me a solemn pledge that the loss of one evening when I wrote nothing (hence nothing bad either) is not irreparable (as in fact it isn't, but it would have to come from the lips which now on Sunday morning keep smiling at these lines, and in which I put all my trust), and that as a result of that one wasted evening I would not lose, deeply problematic though it is, my capacity for writing which, all alone at my table (in the heated living room, little housewife), I so greatly fear. I was too tired to write (actually not too tired, but apprehensive of great tiredness—well, it's 1 o'clock now); I didn't get home till 3 yesterday, but even then sleep would not come for a long time, and quite innocently the 5th hour rang in my horribly alert ear. But again tomorrow there will be another interruption, admittedly also long foreseen, for in the evening I am going—yes,

it's true—to the theater. Thus the entertainments follow one another, but this will be the last for a long time. It must be a year since I went to the theater, and I won't be going again for another year; but tomorrow the Russian Ballet will be here. I saw it once two years ago, and dreamed about it for months, above all about one very wild dancer, Eduardova.[17] She won't be here; very likely she was considered an unimportant lady anyway; the great Karsavina[18] won't be here either (she has been taken ill, to spite me), but there is still a great deal left. You once mentioned the Russian Ballet in a letter; a discussion about the Russian Ballet had taken place at the office. What was it about? And what is this tango-dance you danced? Is that really its name? Is it something Mexican? Why is there no picture of this dance? More beautiful dancing than that of the Russians, more beautiful dancing than individual movements, now and then by individual dancers, I have seen only at Dalcroze's.[19] Have you seen a performance of his Institute in Berlin? I believe they dance there quite often.

But why mingle with dancers, far better go to bed; but before I do, Felice, lay your head on my breast, which needs you so much more than you can imagine. There is so much more to say and to answer, but the mass of things to be said is far greater and more complicated than the actual distance between us, and both appear to be insurmountable.

I've just been wondering how it would be if your mother, as a great surprise, said something friendly when handing you this letter? But perhaps this is impossible; the letter doesn't deserve any friendliness; perhaps it brings you nothing good, although on the whole circumference of this earth there is nothing it would rather do, and it ought to be grateful to be allowed to reach your hands.

Franz

By mistake I have just written the number of my house instead of yours on the envelope, and around me in a circle seven empty chairs were watching.

How can this be explained? Your mother spends the evening in the living room, while your father reads in his bedroom? What does your mother do alone in the living room?

And another thing. I assume your office hours in summer and winter are different, since you say that on Friday afternoons in summer you go to the synagogue. (In the past few years I have been to the synagogue only twice—to my sisters' weddings.)

I thought you were joking about the mice. So they really exist? Poor child!

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, January 19, 1913]

Got home at 3:30. Morning greetings here and there!

FK

Sunday, January 19, 1913, afternoon, a bad hour.

Dearest, no, you shouldn't write the way you did in the last letter but one. I know you cross it all out in today's letter, but still, it was put on paper, and for 24 hours I carried it around inside myself. For don't you know what I am bound to read into these things? Don't you know how weak and wretched and dependent I am on the moment? Above all when, as now, it is four days since I wrote anything for myself. You have some idea, dearest, certainly, or I shouldn't feel so close to you; nevertheless I am going to make a special point of writing it down: When I had read yesterday's letter, I said to myself: "Well, here it is on paper, you haven't even enough steadfastness and self-assurance to satisfy Felice, who certainly makes many more allowances for you than others would. But if you don't even satisfy her, how can you possibly satisfy anyone else? And what you wrote at the time, and to which Felice is replying now, really came straight from the heart. You need that cellar, even if today for instance it seems that not even a cellar could help you.[20] Doesn't Felice appreciate this need? Can't she appreciate it? Doesn't she know the vast number of things you are incapable of? And doesn't she know that if you live in the cellar even that cellar

belongs unconditionally to her? (Though indeed one has to admit that a cellar, and nothing but a cellar, is a sad possession.)" Dearest, my dearest, don't you really know all this? But if so, dearest, what a lot of pain I shall have to inflict upon you, even if everything were to turn out as favorably as in certain dreams. And the more favorable, the more pain. Have I the right to do this? And even if self-preservation demands it of me? There are times when impossibility swamps possibility like a wave.

Don't underestimate, dearest, the steadfastness of that Chinese woman![21] Until the early morning—I don't remember whether the hour is specified—she lay awake in her bed, the glow of the reading lamp kept her awake, but she remained quiet; perhaps by her glances she tried to divert the scholar's attention from his book, but the unhappy man, though greatly devoted to her, didn't notice; God only knows how many sad reasons he had for not noticing, reasons beyond his control but which altogether, in a higher sense, were again devoted only to her. But finally she could no longer contain herself, and did take the lamp away from him, which after all was quite right, beneficial to his health, one hopes not harmful to his studies, conducive to love, which inspired a beautiful poem, and yet, all things considered, was mere self-deception on the woman's part.

Dearest, take me to you, hold me, don't lose faith; the days cast me back and forth; you must realize that you will never get unadulterated happiness from me; only as much unadulterated suffering as one could wish for, and yet—don't send me away. I am tied to you not by love alone, love would not be much, love begins, love comes, passes, and comes again; but this need, by which I am utterly chained to your being, this remains. So you too, dearest, must remain. And don't write any more letters like the last but one.

I have not gone back to my novel lately, not since Thursday evening, and won't today, either. I shall have to spend the afternoon with Max and with Werfel, who is returning to Leipzig tomorrow. I like that young man better every day. I also talked to Buber yesterday; as a person he is lively and simple and remarkable, and seems to have no connection with the tepid things he has written.

Final item: last night the Russians were magnificent. Nijinsky[22] and Kyast[23] are two flawless human beings; they are at the innermost point of their art; they radiate mastery, as do all such people.

But however that may be, as from tomorrow evening I am not going to stir from home again for a long time. Yes, perhaps it was just this loafing about that has brought anxiety to my dearest one. At precisely the time that your letter was written I was with the people who gathered around Buber and Eysoldt after the lecture, and in my enjoyment of the spurious pleasure of being away from home for once, I behaved in a somewhat exaggerated and conspicuous fashion. If only I were back again with my tale![24] If only my beloved were calm again, and resolved once more to take up the unhappiness I cause her and which for a moment she laid down!

Franz

> What did your mother say when handing you the letter? What does your father write? When are you moving? I shall answer your questions about *Meditation* before long. I wrote well for one day, not two. Only one in the whole week! And you still won't allow me the cellar!

January 19, 1913

Now, my poor dearest (when things are not well with me, I call you "poor dearest," thus I wish more than anything else to make myself part of you with all my misfortunes, you truly poor dearest), I arrived home as tired as a chicken, with nothing in my head but the buzz of sleepiness, to find once more a party going on in the other room. And instead of retiring so as to get up in the quiet of midnight, to eat, and then to write some nice, apologetic (is there anything I have to apologize for, dearest? I never know and almost always think there is), wholly conciliatory word to you, I shall, since there is no alternative, combine the noise with my supper, and then go to bed very soon, if possible before 10 o'clock.

Well, now I have escaped to you again. Next door my sister and a cousin are still talking about their children; my mother and Ottla keep interrupting them; my father, my brother-in-law, and the cousin's husband are playing cards; amidst the laughter, jeering, screams, and slamming of cards, my father occasionally interrupts to imitate his grandson, while high above them all sings the canary, which is quite young, belongs to Valli, is living with us for the time being, and has not yet learned to distinguish night from day.

This has been a bad Sunday for me, I am dissatisfied, and the noise next door is a fitting conclusion. And tomorrow the office again, where I had a number of particular unpleasantnesses on Saturday, apart from the general permanent ones, and no doubt they will resume tomorrow as soon as I set foot in the office. And still so far to go before tomorrow evening! Dearest, I would so much like to know details about your office work. (By the way, why don't I get a sales letter? And what was the result of these letters?) For instance, the foreman who calls you to the factory, what does he want? What kind of things do people telephone to you about? What sort of questions do the little ones ask? Where do you have to go in connection with your work? Who is Herr Hartstein? Is there a public phonograph shop on Friedrichstrasse yet? If not, when are you going to have one installed? Which reminds me, I have yet another business idea for you. In hotels a Parlograph should be at the disposal of guests in the same way as a telephone. Don't you agree? Just try to introduce that! How proud I would be if it were to succeed. I would then have 1000 other ideas. And wouldn't I be obliged to, since I am allowed to sit in your office? Would it be so remarkable if, after letting my head rest on your shoulder all day, I had by the evening some minor and probably ridiculous, or long since practiced, business idea?

Franz

From January 20 to 21, 1913

During the day, dearest, the distance between Prague and Berlin is as it is in reality; but from about 9 P.M. on it expands, it expands to the point of improbability. And yet it is in the evening that I can best judge what you are doing. You dine, drink tea, talk to your mother; you then take up your position of martyrdom in bed, write to me, and go to sleep peacefully, I hope. Is tea good for you? Doesn't it overstimulate you? To drink this overstimulating drink every night! My attitude to the food and drink which I myself never, or only in dire need, eat or drink, is not as might be expected. There's nothing I'd rather see eaten than these things. If I am sitting at a table with 10 friends all drinking black coffee, the sight of it gives me a feeling of happiness. Meat can be steaming around me, mugs of beer drained in huge drafts, those juicy Jewish sausages (at least here in Prague that's what they are like, plump as water rats) can be cut up by every relative all over the place (the sound of the taut sausage skin being cut has rung in my ears since childhood)—all this and worse gives me no sensation of distaste whatever; on the contrary, it does me a great deal of good. There is no question of my taking a malicious pleasure in it (I don't even believe in the absolute harmfulness of harmful food; anyone tempted by these sausages would be a fool not to succumb to the desire), it is rather a calm, a calm without envy at the sight of other people's delight, and at the same time admiration for a taste natural to my closest relatives and friends, yet so utterly incomprehensible to me. But all this has no relevance to my fears that tea—especially when you have to work so hard during the day on account of the billing clerk's illness—could do you harm, if for no other reason than by interfering with the sleep which you so badly need. In general I also like tea, and I became absolutely absorbed in your description of your sister's evening meal. But how would it be if instead of tea you were to drink milk, as—if I remember correctly—you originally promised your parents. The food at the office is not up to much either, as you yourself admit. And mornings and afternoons you eat nothing whatever?

It really is strange that you should have bought Buber's book.[25] Do you buy books regularly, or according to your mood, and then a book as expensive as that? I know it only from an extensive review containing various quotations. I can't imagine that it could in any way remind one of Casanova. You also say "his" style; surely it is a translation? Or could it be the kind of drastic adaptation that makes his books of legends so intolerable to me?[26]

Yes, Werfel was here for a month. Good old loafer that he is, he transferred from Leipzig to Prague for a month. He also gave a public lecture here. But it was on the eve of the wedding, and at that time I felt more like being buried than leaving the house.

I am so glad you found Ottla attractive. You are right, she is enormously tall, she takes after our father's family, which has produced some powerful giants. The other naked one is Valli, whom I don't expect you recognized.

But now goodnight, dearest. It's late. Behind me the canary sings sadly and incessantly.

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

January 21, 1913, 2:30 P.M.

Dearest, thank you very much for your letter. I had been sad without any good reason. I am after all the most inconsistent person I know, and if I did not love you once and for all, I would love you anyway simply for being unafraid of this inconsistency. The example of your Aunt Klara is most appropriate today; I am more or less like that. Except that I'm not an aunt, from whom one may suffer such things. This morning before getting up and after a very fitful night's sleep, I was so sad that in my sadness I longed not to throw myself (that would have been too high-spirited for my sadness) but to spill myself out of the window.

But now that I have your letter I hasten to propose to you, dearest, that we never again hold anything against each other, since neither of us can be held responsible. The distance is so great, the

perpetual overcoming of it so tormenting, that one sometimes lets oneself go and for a moment cannot pull oneself together. Then add to this my wretched disposition which knows but three possibilities: to burst forth, collapse, or pine away. And my life consists of a succession of these three possibilities. My poor admirable dearest, who has got herself involved in such a turmoil! I belong to you entirely; this much I can say as a result of surveying my 30 years of life.

Franz

From January 21 to 22, 1913

My poor dearest, since that Chinese poem[27] has acquired such great meaning for us, there is one thing I have to ask you. Didn't you notice that it was specifically about the scholar's mistress, and not his wife, although the scholar is undoubtedly an elderly man, and the combination of scholarship and age would seem to contradict the presence of a mistress. But the poet, ruthlessly striving only for the final situation, ignores this improbability. Was it because he preferred the improbability to an impossibility? And if not, was it perhaps because he feared that a like confrontation of the scholar with his wife might rob the poem of all its gaiety, and create in the reader nothing but sympathy for the woman's misery? The mistress in the poem is not too badly off; this time the lamp really does go out, it was not too much trouble, and there is still plenty of fun left in her. But how would it be had it been his wife, and that night not just any night but a sample of all nights, and then of course not only of nights but of their whole life together, a life that would be a battle for the lamp. Could any reader smile at that? The mistress in the poem is in the wrong because she gains a victory at the time, and wants no more than a single victory; but because she is beautiful and wants but a single victory, and no scholar could ever be convincing in a single attempt, even the severest of readers will forgive her. A wife, on the other hand, would always be in the right; she would claim not a victory but her existence, which the man

poring over his books cannot give her, even though he is perhaps only pretending to be looking at the books, while for days and nights on end he thinks of nothing but his wife whom he loves above all else, but loves with his inherent inadequacy. Here the mistress undoubtedly has a sharper eye than the wife, for she is not completely immersed in the situation; she keeps her head above it. But the wife, poor unhappy creature that she is, fights blindly on; she cannot see what stares her in the face; and what is really a wall she secretly believes to be but a stretched rope, under which one will somehow be able to crawl through. At least that's how it is in my parents' marriage, though the causes involved are very different from those in the Chinese poem.

However, not every Chinese poem in my collection is as favorable to the scholar as this one, and he is called "scholar" only in those poems that are kind about him; elsewhere he is called "bookworm." Then he is compared to the "fearless traveler," the war hero who wins victories over dangerous mountain tribes. It is a wife who awaits his return, no doubt anxiously, but overjoyed at the sight of him; they look into each other's eyes like a devoted couple who love each other and have the right to love each other; there are no sidelong glances like those of the mistress when, from the goodness and the bidding of her heart, she is watching the scholar. Moreover, there are children who wait and skip around the returning father, while the "bookworm's" home is empty; there are no children there.

Dearest, what a dreadful poem that is, I hadn't realized it. Perhaps, since it can be opened up, it can also be crushed under foot and left behind; human life has many levels; the eye sees but one possibility, but in the heart all possibilities are present. What do you think, dearest?

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

January 22, 1913

Again two letters, dearest; aren't you afraid? For don't you realize that after a spell of two letters a day we invariably have a total collapse? Provided, of course, we haven't collapsed already, in which case we can only be thankful that no one is watching, for how very ashamed we would have to be! By the way, what happened to your lunch yesterday? I looked for it in vain between the lines. Could you have skipped it? But that would be dreadful! Yes, do send me the new list of references! Of course. I throw myself upon everything done by you. Nebble doesn't like the list? One of these days we shall really have to give him a spanking. Listen, this evening (it's too late now) I'll tell you about a new business idea that should stir up your office. Farewell, dearest, a certain person is hurrying off to lunch, and demands that you do the same.

Franz

From January 22 to 23, 1913

Very late, dearest, and yet I shall go to bed without deserving it. Well, I won't sleep anyway, only dream. As I did yesterday, for example, when in my dream I ran toward a bridge or some balustrading, seized two telephone receivers[28] that happened to be lying on the parapet, put them to my ears, and kept asking for nothing but news from "Pontus"; but nothing whatever came out of the telephone except a sad, mighty, wordless song and the roar of the sea. Although well aware that it was impossible for human voices to penetrate these sounds, I didn't give in, and didn't go away.

For the past three days I have written very little of my novel, and that little I wrote with such skill as might perhaps be adequate for chopping wood, not even for chopping wood, at best for playing cards. Well, just lately (this is not a self-reproach, rather a self-consolation) I have dragged myself out of writing by my feet, and must now bore my way back in with my head.

Dearest, you are crying? Do you know what that means? It means you despair of me. Do you really? No, dearest, don't do that. You must know from experience that with me it goes around in a circle. In one particular, continually recurring spot I stumble and scream. Don't leap to my assistance (by the way, can you read my writing? A somewhat belated question), don't get upset; I am up again, as erect as I can be. Don't cry, dearest! Anyway I should have known that you had been crying, even if you hadn't told me; I did torment you, like a Red Indian his enemy, perhaps even in yesterday's letter. Mercy, dearest, mercy! Perhaps, dearest, you secretly think that because of my love for you I might control my moods so far as you are concerned. Yes, but how do you know, dearest, that I didn't do just that, and with all my strength, ludicrous as this may be?

Shall I go to bed now, or first tell you my business ideas? No, I will tell you now; every day they are not carried out is a day wasted. Just listen to the progress I am making here, too. The other day I suggested introducing a hall for music, and now it appears that 2 have been operating in Berlin for years. (But that there should be one in every large town is really not very nice.) Then I made the suggestion about the hotels, which now turns out to be first of all bad, and secondly out of date. Still, it was tried only 6 months ago; perhaps today's suggestions were carried out only 3 months ago, in which case I am gradually approaching the present.

However, instead of abandoning hope about the hotels, one should, as a keen businessman, make renewed attempts now, at the end of the 6 months. Did some hotels actually buy Parlographs? Anyway, it mightn't be a bad gamble to put a Parlograph at the disposal of certain hotels free of charge, thereby forcing others to provide them. For as a rule hotels are wildly competitive.

Well, my new ideas:

1. Organize a typing bureau where everything dictated into Lindström's Parlographs is transcribed on a typewriter, at cost price, or at first perhaps slightly below cost price. Perhaps the whole thing could be made even cheaper by contacting a

typewriter manufacturer, who would undoubtedly offer favorable terms for the sake of advertisement and competition.

2. Invent a Parlograph (issue orders to the foremen, dearest) that takes dictation only after the insertion of a coin. These Parlographs will then be installed wherever automats, mutoscopes,[29] etc., are to be found today. As on mailboxes, each Parlograph will show the time at which the dictation, turned into typescript, will be taken to the post office. I can already see Lindström Inc.'s small motorcars collecting the used rolls from these Parlographs and inserting new ones.
3. Contact the Reich Post Office Department and install these Parlographs at all major post offices.
4. These machines, moreover, will be installed in all places where one might have the time and inclination to write, but which lack the necessary peace and comfort—i.e., in railway carriages, on ships, in Zeppelins, in trams (when on one's way to the professor). In your hotel questionnaire, have you paid special attention to summer resort hotels, where businessmen, quivering with anxiety, would besiege the Parlographs?
5. Invent a combination of telephone and Parlograph. This really can't be too difficult. The day after tomorrow, of course, you will tell me that this has already been accomplished successfully. But it really would be of immense importance for the press, news agencies, etc. More difficult, but surely quite possible, would be a combination of gramophone and telephone. More difficult, simply because one can't understand a word the gramophone says, and a Parlograph can't very well ask for clearer pronunciation. A combination of gramophone and telephone would not be of such great universal importance; it would only be a relief to people who, like me, are afraid of the telephone. People like me, however, are equally afraid of the gramophone, so for them there is no help whatever. Here, by the way, is a rather nice idea: a Parlograph goes to the telephone in Berlin, while a gramophone does likewise in Prague, and these two carry on a little conversation with each

other. But dearest, the combination of Parlograph and telephone simply must be invented.

Heavens, it really has got late! I sacrifice my nights to your business. Answer me in detail, not necessarily all at once, or I would overflow with ideas. And not two letters a day, dearest! And have a proper lunch! And be calm! Don't cry! Don't despair! Consider me a madman whose madness may still be in the balance! And seriously now, "Goodnight!" and a kiss, helpless with love.

Franz

From January 23 to 24, 1913

Nothing, nothing, the whole long day, nothing. Every quarter of an hour until 11 o'clock I fly along the corridors, search every hand, nothing. Then it must be at home; arrive home, and nothing. And this just at a time when our boat is rocking slightly; my fault, of course, you dearest girl, tormented to death.

What's the meaning of your not writing? Anything bad? You, whom I felt to be so close to me, have now gone your own way in Berlin for a whole day, and I know nothing about you. Which day was it? The last time you wrote was Tuesday lunchtime. Then in the evening you couldn't; all right; Wednesday during the day you couldn't; all right; but then you wrote, pray wrote (I pray for the past tense), wrote on Wednesday evening; and tomorrow morning, first mail, I shall get your letter and read that you don't want to leave me, even if you were to find in me not a human being but (as one might well believe from some of my letters) a sick ape gone berserk.

Sometimes I think of the false impression those around you—the little ones, Frl. Lindner, your mother and sister—must get from our correspondence. They must think that over there in Prague lives some honest, faithful young man who has nothing but kind and good things to say to Felice day after day, things such as the said Felice deserves, and such as would make no one raise an eyebrow. And not one of them knows that he could very often do Felice a

good turn by opening the window a little, and before her return throwing the letter out of that window.

That is just the difference between us, Felice. When things go badly with me (and I'm almost glad they haven't stopped doing so lately, for I deserve it), it is my fault. It is I who am being flogged, and again it is I who do the flogging; but you, Felice, how could one find the slightest fault with you?

I have written nothing today; I went to see Max, he had asked me by letter, then by word of mouth reproached me for our drifting apart; claims it's my fault of course, my way of life; that I go to see him at best once a week, and when I do, I look as though I had just been drummed out of the deepest sleep. What shall I do? I hold on to time by my teeth, and yet it gets wrenched out. On Saturday I have to go to Max again. There is something of the husband about him; he's independent of moods, and, in spite of suffering and troubles, superficially gay.—Dearest, tomorrow you are to appear to me in that dreadful office!

Franz

From January 24 to 25, 1913

I have never known you as incensed as you are about your Aunt Klara. How beautiful you are! How I love you! Aunt Klara certainly is a strange female, and since her mind works in that way, it must indeed be difficult for her to let her daughter work in a provincial theater. I don't know your cousin, because I didn't go to Sophie's wedding—not, as you may think, because I had no time (in those days I had no time only at the moment when something was expected of me; otherwise I didn't know what to do with my surplus of misery and time), but for the simple reason that I was afraid of so many strangers. So I stood at the entrance to the synagogue, and learned later that the girl accompanying Otto Brod—about whom I remember nothing except that she wore a showy, unattractive hat with a hollow crown stuffed full of white flowers, and carried herself proudly—had been the actress. Pity I didn't go to that

wedding! I might have talked to your brother, and even in the most insignificant conversation something would certainly have cropped up that I would remember now and that could be regarded as an omen for the significance that you, the unknown sister, have acquired for me. Signs appear at all times, everything is filled with signs, but we notice them only when they are thrust upon us.

You defend your food admirably (on reading your letter for the first time this morning I felt like having bites of your delicious sandwiches and eating them myself, and with them perhaps even drinking some weak tea with lemon, with which years ago I used to enjoy acidifying myself), but, dearest, you will not make me yield. Nevertheless, on account of my immense love, and because these reforms seem to me neither good, nor right, nor profitable, I may gladly allow you sausages, cold meats, etc.; but I still don't like the amount of tea you drink, least of all the regularity with which you drink it. And you defend it in the way everyone defends the poison he is accustomed to: you say your tea was not so very strong, just as you might tell your mother—if, when handing you this letter, she were to call our correspondence your undoing—that you are well able to put up with it. But aren't you wrong about the tea? (I am not talking about our correspondence; for this poison, should it be one, I have got to administer; there's nothing I can do about it.) Don't drink tea quite so often. But at once I hear your mother exclaim: "What's the idea?" and dare not offer any further advice. Have a pleasant Sunday! And a little peace and quiet!

Franz

Now I have finished the letter; it is certainly late enough, but there are still some things I have to say:

Above all a reproach for not trusting me with the commission for your sister. I started reading the relevant part of your letter quite proudly, and grew smaller and smaller the more I read, until the following letter made me realize I had no chance at all, and that the commission had already been carried out. Oh, how could you make me feel so small! Don't you know that the

thought of being able to do something for you can make me positively shrewd, and that I would have organized the dispatch promptly and perfectly? The joy of doing you a favor would have exceeded a hundred times all the trouble.

Needless to say, I would very much like to see the picture of the little one; after all, I ought to know who lives with me in the locket, and what kind of little person it is who has such claim on your kisses.

The mail has played a trick on me again. Your Wednesday letter, the one you wrote at the dentist's, didn't arrive at the office until Thursday afternoon; I got it only on Friday morning —cursing and happy.

Another thing before I say goodbye: Do you keep a diary? Unnecessary question, you really haven't the time now. But did you ever keep one? For long? You once mentioned an entry when telling me of your great love at the age of 15. But not a word about it since.

But now really goodnight. An exchange of letters could be very pleasant, if only at the end of a letter, just as at the end of a conversation, one didn't feel the natural desire to look deeply into the other's eyes.

Imagine, I have yet another letter to write to a friend. But I intend to dash that one off so that no human eye can read it.

Very latest decision: I am not going to write the letter at all, and am off to bed.

Franz

You send me so very few newspaper clippings, and I am sending you such a nice one again. Surely you couldn't have lost the clipping about the beatification of the 22 Negro youths from Uganda?[30]

For January 26, 1913

Got home at 1 o'clock on Saturday.

I want you to know, dearest, that I think of you with such love and concern, as though God had entrusted you to me in most unequivocal terms.

Franz

Sunday, January 26, 1913

What is it, dearest? What is driving you through the streets? Are you really the girl in today's picture, who smiles neither too much nor too little, and to whom one would look in every emergency in order to calm oneself? Yet you cry? Come now, you maintain that I am upset by you, while in fact what shows is no more than my inadequacy, the very thing you have already experienced for yourself and which, poor dear, I am afraid you will have to experience many more times. But tell me quite honestly, how has *your* life changed since we met? In your very next letter please tell me precisely when you cried last—before I started driving you to tears with my letters and apart from isolated occasions caused by, say, irritation with irrational aunts, travelers deserving to be flogged, etc. But what happened on Friday? What was it all about? Did my letter contain hidden torments that even I don't know about? Was it the bad after-effect of an earlier letter? Perhaps I was not the cause? But then, what was it? Overwork? You are not the girl to be thrown into confusion without some cogent and immediate reason. Dearest, do tell me! Imagine you are talking to yourself!

My novel! The night before last I declared myself utterly vanquished by it. It is falling apart, I can no longer contain it; though I write nothing that could be said to be completely dissociated from myself, it has recently become altogether too disconnected; wrong things appear and cannot be made to disappear; it will be in greater danger if I continue to work on it than if I drop it for the time being. For the past week I have also been sleeping as though on watch; I start up every few moments. My headaches have become a regular feature, and minor, varying

nervous symptoms continue to trouble me: in short, I am going to stop writing altogether, and meanwhile for a week—possibly for much longer, in fact—do nothing but rest. Last night I did not write any more, and I immediately slept amazingly well. If I knew that you too were resting, I would enjoy my rest even more.

What a beautiful, delicately worked dress you are wearing in the picture, and what is the rest of it like? Are you standing, or sitting? Your right arm is missing. That shiny thing, is it the locket?—But what's the good of pictures? In this one you look flourishing, your cheeks are round, your eyes clear; you are as your mother and I would like you to be, and in reality you lie awake in bed till late at night, and cry.

I have heard of the book *Women around Nap*[*oleon*].[31] I am not easily convinced by books of this kind, even if, apart from the necessary desire, I had the time to read them. These studies must inevitably feed on sensation. No doubt Napoleon had less to do with women than might be imagined by an observer who allows himself, slowly but surely, to be raised above all ordinary knowledge of human nature and experience of the world by the exclusive and prolonged scrutiny of Napoleon. I once read a strange post-mortem report on Napoleon's body, in which his exercise of restraint toward women was mentioned in a convincing context as though it were a well-known fact. In spite of what seems like a contradiction, his lovesick letters to Josephine speak for this theory, as does the crudeness of his utterances on sexual matters.

What makes you think I am not on good terms with Max? Never since we have known each other, which must be about 10 years now, have we been angry with each other. This kind of relationship, of course, is subject to its ups and downs, like all things human, especially where I am involved. Thus in the course of the years I have had many things to reproach myself for vis-à-vis him; he on the other hand may be entirely blameless. But I shall have to write to you about this more fully one day. Not today, I wouldn't be able to describe it properly.

Just now, at 4 in the afternoon, I got your express letter. Dearest, dearest, no unnecessary worries! I always feel 10 times better than I say; it is just my pen that runs away with me, that's all. What dreadful things I may have written again! You can see what a great writer I am: I want to reassure my dearest girl, and all I do is upset her. I am a hopeless case, and I don't even deserve a kiss.

Franz

From January 26 to 27, 1913

I have been sitting for a long time over Hebbel's[32] letters, and now it's late. He was a man who knew how to endure pain and proclaim the truth, just because he felt secure in his innermost being. Not a streak in his personality is blurred; he does not tremble, and yet from the age of 30 he lived between 2 women, had two families, deaths in both. He was always able to introduce an account of anything he had done with the words: "If a clear conscience is the test of action, …" How far removed am I from men like these! If I were to examine my conscience but once, I should have to spend my life looking at the ups and downs of that conscience. So I prefer to turn my back on it, to have nothing to do with such examinations, and only when the suspicion of what goes on behind my back becomes too strong does it pull me down a bit.

As a result, of course, I am the guilty one, everywhere, also in my relationship with Max. Out of love, weakness, cowardice, and many other partly unknown reasons, I have not always been quite honest with him, neither in minor matters at every step, nor always in important matters, either.—But I am reluctant to write about it; I can't, dearest, not today; don't be angry about it, and understand.

But you need have no worries whatever about our mutual relationship; you should have seen us laughing together yesterday evening when we were alone in the coffeehouse; his friendship for me is unshakable, so is mine for him; *it is only that the focus of this friendship rests within myself alone, so that I alone know when it fluctuates, and thus with the pain I alone derive from it I can atone for*

*the guilt, which likewise is mine alone.* Max's remark which I told you about and which worried you was made quite casually, in the usual way he has of saying any number of things that actually have nothing to do with him, without thinking and without an abiding sense of responsibility. You don't know him well enough, and you don't know my overstating, uncontrolled writing well enough, and you become alarmed. Oh, it would behoove me to dispel the alarm I have caused with kisses!

Franz

From January 27 to 28, 1913

You should be here at this moment, dearest (an odd sort of invitation, it's long past midnight); we could spend a lovely quiet evening, so quiet that in the end you might even feel it was uncanny. Poor dearest, do tell me how it feels to be so greatly loved? All I want is to hold your hands and feel your nearness. A modest wish? And yet it does not cleave the night and the distance.

Many thanks for the list of references. And Nebble didn't like it? And no foot can be found to give him the deserved kick? I haven't quite finished reading the brochure; a form of hypochondria (to which your future customers are surely not subject) makes me afraid of such small print; nevertheless, I have already noticed I was too late with my suggestion for combining the Parl[ograph] with the telephone, an idea on which I had been preening myself for days. So it already exists, and cannot be used on a large scale? For important discussions which have to be taken down with scrupulous accuracy in banks, agencies, etc., where the most accurate records or the presence of witnesses are required, a Parl. should be indispensable. While an employee holds one receiver, the other would be connected to the Parl., and thus irrefutable evidence in the speaker's own voice could be obtained.—The clear layout and impressiveness of the list might perhaps be supported by the inclusion of a sheet upon which the buyers are listed according to the nature of their business, and at the same time a very short outline of the P.'s

capabilities could be given, according to the buyer's own testimony. —But on the whole it's magnificent as it is, and I am so proud of you that I can't possibly restrain myself from smothering you with kisses, so much so that in reality you would regret ever having compiled the list. Though of course this could not be foreseen, least of all by the management.

I meant to tell you yesterday how glad I am you wrote to Sophie. I will pester her endlessly with requests for stories about you, but of course I shall do so with the delicacy and cunning expected of someone with my great adroitness and conversational skill!—And even if it isn't so, is it such a bad thing that I love you? Not too bold a question!

Franz

From January 28 to 29, 1913

Again I come to you, dearest, from Hebbel's letters. I don't know how ordinary people, preoccupied by their mundane professions and their mundane concerns, react to these letters which reveal a man who, out of his innermost being, turbulent with poetic effort and forever pouring forth, even in moments of weakness, comes up with the wildest confessions—but I for my part can actually feel him (though measured with a steady eye, I am as far removed from him as the smallest moon is from the sun) quite close to my body; he laments at my throat, he touches my weaknesses directly with his fingers, and sometimes, rarely enough, he carries me along as though the two of us were friends.

I cannot describe his effect on me in detail; I cannot deduce the second from the first, life becomes too difficult in such rarefied air; I break away from the actual struggle to repose in the sight of the whole. My powers of reasoning are incredibly limited; to sense the development in the results, that I can do; but to ascend from the development to the results or step by step to reconstruct it from the results, that is not given to me. It is as though I were falling down

upon these things, and caught sight of them only in the confusion of my fall.

Hebbel's thinking is very precise and contains none of the subterfuges in which one tends to seek refuge when in despair. His thinking comes not only from his inherent strength, dating back to his earliest youth (he picked up his education in a haphazard and miserable way); it also follows a method of his own, inherent from the very beginning and bordering on the ingenuous. When I try to follow all this in detail, the beneficial human effects of his letters cease at once, and he simply crushes me.

For today's letter, dearest, my very special thanks. God knows in what difficult circumstances you wrote it, but even so, you did write it; and when leaving the office I had in my pocket a sheet of paper on which you had written the previous day, and which could be held, caressed, and loved. Imagine, I even ate the chocolate, slowly of course, hesitatingly, anxiously; but the temptation to participate as much as possible in your life and pleasures was too great. It didn't do me any harm either, for everything that comes from you (in this you are unlike me) is lovely and good and harmless.

Franz

From January 29 to 30, 1913

No doubt it belongs to the order of all that is new in my experience since last summer that now at last I too can catch colds as thoroughly as other people. And that I catch cold without knowing the reason, and in spite of this hardened and a-thousand-times-massaged skin of mine. Am I perhaps in need of the hot tea with which my beloved, in my opinion (though now, after these colds, no longer relevant), likes to stimulate herself? Do you know, there was a time when I thought I saw in the impossibility of my catching a cold a not insignificant sign of my increasingly rapid downfall; of the fact of this rapid downfall I was always convinced. I said to myself: (the not catching cold was of course but one sign among many) this is how I detach myself little by little from human

fellowship; I took care to notice anything that might offer some proof; every little thing went wrong; not all fears were confirmed, but all hopes were disappointed; if, when discussing the most trivial things with someone, he turned his head only slightly to one side, I at once felt rebuffed, and could see no way of drawing the other's face back toward me and thus holding on to it. Once I did succeed in almost wholly convincing Max, usually quite impervious to these states, that things with me were steadily deteriorating, and that no one, no matter how much he loved me, however close he sat beside me, looking into my eyes to reassure me, even putting his arms around me (more out of desperation than love), could possibly save me. I would have to be left to my own devices, which I actually preferred, and for the rest be tolerated for as long as humanly possible. At that time we, just the two of us, made an excursion to Dobřichovice, a pretty place near Prague where we also stayed the night. It rained all of one afternoon; I lay on the sofa in Max's room (we had two rooms, for I have to sleep alone; you may take this for courage, actually it is apprehension: just as when lying on the floor one cannot fall, so, when alone, nothing can happen to one), feeling quite apathetic, yet I couldn't go to sleep, but didn't want to keep my eyes open for fear of disturbing Max who was at the table starting (and finishing) his short novel *A Czech Maidservant*[33] (which you may have read later in the *Berliner Tageblatt*); there I lay, eyes closed, wearily listening to the rain falling with a lot of noise on the wooden roof and the wooden balcony, and consumed with impatience for Max finally to finish his story (which, by the way, he was writing frantically, the pen simply flying across the paper) so that I could get up and stretch a little, but actually for no other purpose than to renew my desire to throw myself once more onto the sofa and go on lying there in my apathy. For many years, and when I try to look back more carefully, for an infinite number of days, that's how I lived. Your hand, dearest, so that there may be a like infinity of beautiful days! Your dear, beautiful hand which, alas, I do not dare to seize.

Franz

From January 30 to 31, 1913

Dearest, please don't torment yourself by writing to me at greater length than you can manage comfortably in the time at your disposal; I do want to be your comforter, not your tormentor. A greeting and the assurance that you are there for me—I am quite content with that in times like these. Are you not being rather overburdened at the office, now that they have saddled you with the work of a third girl who is ill, as well as the billing clerk and Frl. Grossmann? Surely the management should realize that this is too much.

How very much better off I am, or rather could be, than you! If you had as much free time as I, you would lead a useful, pleasant life that would be a joy to you and to everyone else. Indeed, this you manage even now, in spite of being tied to your office till 7:45 in the evening, without a break for lunch—it's dreadful. I really don't do anything; people with moods that interfere with their work should not be tolerated in any office; you would shake your head if, for example, you could see what I did at the office today. I have a great variety of old things lying on my desk—though perhaps not as much as some time ago, for meanwhile there has been one week of reasonably useful work—but today I should first of all have finished a report for the ministry—actually, an unimportant one—which I started yesterday. But I found it impossible; I could think of nothing; in addition, a great organizing job had to be done at the office today; my typist was needed for it, so there I sat at the typewriter myself, feeling fit for nothing but keeping my hands in my lap. At times like these even the typewriter loses its ability to write, and if one simply stares at the machine, it begins to look like an ancient invention, long since obsolete—a mere piece of scrap iron. I wrote about 8 pages, and tomorrow I face the pleasant prospect of having to tear up these 8 pages as useless, and to start the report—supposed to run to some 20 pages—all over again. Only very rarely will dictation flow from my lips like the orations of Homeric heroes, and the danger lies in the rarity, for all of a sudden it may fail me forevermore. Still, one survives, and the juices continue to flow,

however sluggishly. But just consider that apart from my office I do practically nothing, and that owing to my neglect of the factory I hardly dare cast a glance at my father, let alone say a word to him. Well, dearest, praise me a little for my lovely way of life.

Franz

From [January] 31 to February 1, 1913

No news whatever, my dearest; I told them at the office that if something were to come during the afternoon, they were to send it on to me, but nothing came. There were two letters yesterday, wish they had spaced themselves out! But I am not worried; if you are as harassed as you have been recently, you may safely let a day go by; you are held close within me, and so I know about you.

The cold is still with me, or actually not a cold, rather perhaps a largely hypochondriacal, nevertheless slightly uncanny sensation of shivers all down my back, as though a spray of cold water were being constantly directed toward me, finding me wherever I happen to be. Even now, while writing in the warm room; it's really devilish.

When in this state, nothing can cheer one up so much as getting a letter full of unreasonable demands such as the one I got today from Stoessl. He also writes about my book [*Meditation*], but with such complete lack of understanding that for a moment I thought the book must really be good, since—even in a man as discerning and experienced in literary matters as Stoessl—it can create the kind of misunderstanding one would consider impossible with books and possible only with living, hence complex, human beings. There is only one explanation: either that he read the book superficially, or only parts of it, or (though the impression of good faith his personality creates with every word makes it unlikely) that he didn't read it at all. I am copying the relevant passage for you, because his writing is quite illegible, and even if after much effort you thought you could decipher it, you would undoubtedly be reading it with misleading interpretations. He writes: "I read your outwardly as

well as inwardly beautifully executed book at once and at a sitting, and derived much pleasure from the strangely elusive, delicately controlled, lighthearted, yet profound gaiety of the small memorials to minor and major moments in life. It is full of very pertinent humor, turned inward as it were, not unlike the way in which, after a good night's sleep, a refreshing bath, and dressed in clean linen, one welcomes a free, sunny day with happy expectations and an inconceivable sensation of strength. The humor of a healthy frame of mind. One can think of no happier condition for an author himself, no safer guarantee, than the limpid atmosphere of his first work." By the way, there is one other explanation for this opinion which I forgot just now: he doesn't like the book; this, considering the special structure of his character, would not be inconceivable. The letter, incidentally, goes rather well with an extravagantly favorable review published today, which finds in the book nothing but sorrow.[34]

Sophie [Friedmann] arrived this evening; had it not been for my back, chilled to the bone, and the "humor of a healthy frame of mind," I would have liked to meet her at the station. Having had no news of you, I should at least have glimpsed a pair of eyes that have seen you for weeks on end; no doubt your name would have been mentioned, and even if it had all been confined to one short tram ride, it would still have been nice. But next week I shall besiege her, and even if, despite your promises, I should have heard nothing from you about your stay in Breslau, I am determined to make her talk. Dearest, what a substitute for your presence! In your absence I embrace rumors, talk, allusions, recollections—and there the matter rests.

To prevent you from being alone in your court cases, I am off to attend court at Leitmeritz again on Monday. Very tiresome! This time, however, it won't interrupt a story. But I should have preferred, with a brief detour via Berlin, to have gone to the warm South, where Max and his wife are going on Sunday afternoon. But how can this be done?

Franz

Mother, a kind word today![35]

From February 1 to 2, 1913

I am just sitting down at my desk for the first time since my afternoon letter.[36] What's the time? (I am writing the answer on the next page, like those horrible surprises in a serial novel.)‡ I spent the whole afternoon with Werfel, the evening with Max and—tormented by fatigue and pressure in the head, today near the crown of my skull—didn't get to bed until after eight. Needless to say, the usual chatter from next door had started, and, from time to time, just as fatigue had plunged me into sleep, it would whip me violently awake again. Nevertheless I stayed in bed until now in a perfect mixture of sleep, drowsiness, dreaminess, and definite wakefulness, getting up only to write to you, dearest, and to make notes of a few things for my novel that attacked me in bed with a mighty burst, though my dread of these isolated illuminations of future events is greater than my desire for them. I found my supper on my table, for once correctly prepared (being so complicated, this is by no means easy), but I put it away uneaten. For a few days my stomach, like the rest of me, has been out of order, and I am trying to cure it by starving. Today for instance I ate only at lunchtime. I mention this so as to hold before your eyes every detail from which I expect success.

Werfel read to me some new poems; again they undoubtedly spring from a tremendous personality. Astonishing how this kind of poem, carrying its inherent end in its beginning, rises with a continuous, inner, flowing development—how one opens one's eyes while lying doubled up on the sofa. And the young man has grown handsome and reads with such ferocity (to the monotony of which I actually have some objections)! He knows by heart everything he has ever written, and his passion seems to set fire to the heavy body, the great chest, the round cheeks; and when reading aloud he looks as if he were about to tear himself to pieces. He will be reading in Berlin in February; whatever happens, you must go. And of course there was some talk about you (if not by name); how could I spend an afternoon without you? And he wrote a short dedication for me

in his *Friend of the World*[37] to "A Person Unknown," to annoy Frl. Lindner. I will send you the book before long—if only the job of packing, mailing, etc., weren't always such a problem. This is also why *Intensity of Feeling* has been lying around here for so long; of course the book is yours, I promised it to you ages ago. Similarly Flaubert, in French and destined for you, has been lying about my desk for weeks, and I abandon myself to reveries about the possible ways of packing and mailing.

Could you actually read the letter from Löwy that I sent you for Sunday? He played in Berlin on Sunday, at least this is what I thought I had gathered from his letter, and so I perpetrated the ruse of underlining that passage. I reproached myself for it afterwards, and am now glad that you either didn't notice the underlined passage, or didn't go to the theater for some other reason. I make sufficient demands on the little free time you have, more than sufficient! Werfel, who also met Löwy, told me that the Leipzig correspondent of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, a certain Dr. Pinthus,[38] whom by the way I also know (he is a clumsy creature and little can be expected of him), liked the company so much that he is going to write an article about them in the *B.T.* Please send it to me if you come across it; I still think of the actors with pleasure.

Your suggestions, dearest, for a new timetable—I can't follow them. The present way is the only possible one; if I can't bear it, so much the worse; but I will bear it somehow. One to two hours for writing is not enough (apart from the fact that you have not allocated any time for writing to you); ten hours would be perfect, but since perfection cannot be achieved one must at least come as close to it as possible, and not give a thought to sparing oneself. Anyway, I have made terribly bad use of the last few days for my writing; things will have to change; it is undermining me; again today I have written nothing whatever, and when going to bed this evening I was in such despair about my tiredness and the short time at my disposal that I prayed half-asleep for the whole world to be placed in my hands, so that bereft of my senses I could shake it in a blind rage. Oh God! Oh dearest!

Franz

February 2, 1913

Dearest, do you know where your hardy, chill-proof, cast-iron madman is writing to you at this moment? By no means out in the clear winter night, but shame upon shame, in the warm kitchen. Only the living room is heated; in this gale and at this height it is almost impossible to heat anything else; my room is unheated because I mean to go to Leitmeritz this afternoon (although I may not go until tomorrow); the family are asleep in the living room, one on top of the other; but the kitchen is empty and quiet, and if it weren't for the cold tiles and the loud ticking of the clock, it would be the perfect writing room.

Max's wedding is over, and he is already on his way to the South, but there were no special wedding celebrations, as you seem to think there would be; just the marriage ceremony at the hotel, nothing else, no wedding-eve party, no banquet, so my fear of people was not put to the test. But I did derive some special pleasure from the wedding, for Sophie, with whom I exchanged a few words, told me she had something to tell me, and since I have a lot to listen to, this suits me very well. Though I can't go to the Brods' either today or tomorrow, on Tuesday I will dash there. I don't really want to hear anything special, I just want to be near Sophie, because you have been near her.

Dearest, I can't help it, I have to stop, though I feel as though I were being torn from you bodily. On Tuesday you will only get postcards from me. Dearest, may you be preserved from bad dreams, no matter how much meaning and warning they may contain.

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Leitmeritz, February 3, 1913]

Best wishes. Just managed to get ready in time to leave. My sister and traveling companion sends greetings below in her own hand.

FK.

Ottla Kafka

[On the return journey from Leitmeritz to Prague, February 3, 1913]

It's dark in the train; one can no longer write; also I am tired, everybody around me is asleep, my sister is in the corridor looking out of the window, and at this very moment is turning toward me. It is raining like mad. I am glad to be on my way back to your letter, to sleep, to the possibility of writing.

Farewell, dearest, farewell.

Franz

From February 3 to 4, 1913

Take me, dearest, just as I am. Worn out by the journey, even more worn out by myself, I nevertheless went to the Brods' this evening. And what did I accomplish there? For myself, a good deal. For two hours I sat next to Sophie, next to whom you too had been sitting, sat in the same place as that day in August, and your name was mentioned twice. But I cannot claim much credit for the mentioning of your name, and if your name was not mentioned more often, it was probably I who prevented it. Your name was first mentioned suddenly in the middle of some other conversation. You sent your regards, Sophie said, to everyone, "from Frau Brod all the way to Dr. Kafka." The sequence of your greetings would have suited me, for after you had disposed of them all, I would have had you for myself alone, I would have held you and not have had to let you go. Moreover, the fact that you were mentioned among strangers, and that I felt closer to you than any of them, hence superior to all of them, gave me a feeling of warmth, and I was very contented. But this one mention was the limit of what I could have borne without becoming conspicuous, without making faces, without becoming

unhappy at the thought that everyone after all had been able to share in you. And so I tried to banish you from my mind, and only when they had stopped talking of you did you become audible to me again.

Dearest, how tired you must be! No doubt Berlin has to be like that, and probably everyone leads that kind of life, but how can you stand your work at the office on so little sleep? I am sure it is impossible without undue strain and damage to your health. You know, one does worry about these things from afar. You mustn't imagine that I see the necessity for all this. I realize that everything in Berlin is bound to be noisier and gayer than here (yet even our noise and our gaiety are more than I can cope with). In similar circumstances, above all with Max's circle of friends, a wedding as he conducted his, not without my influence (I am a great authority on carelessness and informality), would probably be impossible in Berlin. What a state you must have been in on Monday! But who am I to judge, I who am generally incapable even of passing the time of day with anyone? I cannot keep a conversation going. Even the sight of a familiar face soon leads me astray.

Franz

From February 4 to 5, 1913

That you won so many things, my lucky dearest, is of course nice, and I am pleased, but a fountain pen was not necessary for your letters to me; I like them no matter how they are written. Fancy those raffle tickets pouring down on you, and you being dragged to and fro! And I not there, in a corner, to hold you and keep you away from everyone else!

The postcard with your mother's signature arrived this afternoon. What is your mother's first name? Anna? It all looks very formal, you know—"Greetings" and "Frau." Still, for me it is a very special gift.—Why is Frau Bluen so affected? And what sort of a party was it? It took place at that great table? Where did you sit, and your mother?

A certain Otto Pick[39] writes to me today (does his name mean anything to you? He has published quite a good book of poetry entitled *A Friendly Experience*. You may have read an article of his about Werfel in *Der Zeitgeist*[40]). Anyway, he writes: “I have a prospective customer for a Parlograph, and would be glad if you could let me have further information (if possible with price list).” I met him by chance on the very day I received your list of references; made an appointment on the spot (since in my opinion he has great business ability, as well as contacts with newspapers and banks where, as I see it, although newspapers and banks may not be mentioned in the list, it should be easy to introduce the Parlograph), took the list to him that evening, and set him to work at once. And now this is his reaction. But how can the machine be demonstrated? Who knows, I may even be able to find an agent. Give me a little time. After all, who in Prague has a Parlograph? Löwy and Winterberg are certainly a large concern—as far as I know the third largest timber merchant in Bohemia; I have had dealings with them in the past. Just force a Parlograph on them, you dearest businesswoman. I cannot recommend the Parlograph itself, but if it is a question of a reference stating that you are the best and sweetest girl, that hence even an impractical machine, provided it was you who sold it, has its virtues, just because it was you who sold it—then all they have to do is come to me.

Franz

From February 5 to 6, 1913

Dearest, it really is an unbelievably pleasant surprise to find yet another letter from you waiting at home. If only it weren’t marred by the thought that with this letter I hold in my hands the misspent hour that should have been devoted to your walk, furthermore if it is permissible to write twice, then there is no reason why we shouldn’t write to each other all the time, and for heaven’s sake move closer together until we are completely together, each in the other’s arms. But this is not likely to happen, and so only gets one

down. Finally one is left with the dread that there might not be a letter the next day, at least not first thing. And it's that letter, the one laid on the table first thing in the morning, without the torment of waiting, which is such a comfort.

While you were writing to me on Monday I was no longer on the train, but at the Brods'; your name may have been mentioned at that very moment, whereupon I lapsed into silence and thoughts of you.

The journey went off fairly well. At first, the thought of getting up at 4:30 A.M., as I did last time, sitting in the train, then in the damp and cold and misery of the coach, seeing my relatives, attending court, and finally the same silent train journey home—all this was so odious to me that I had decided to go in the evening and spend the night in Leitmeritz, at the same time bearing in mind my cold, which has now completely gone. What's more, sleeping in a hotel room, sitting in an unfamiliar, overcrowded restaurant on a Sunday evening—this is quite good for me, it's where I like to be silent. But then, unexpectedly and by force, the Weltsch[41] family dragged me to the theater that evening to see *Miss Josette—My Wife* in which a mutual friend was appearing for the first time—needless to say, in the most minor of parts: all she had to do was to give a sudden laugh in the first scene, show her delight, and throw up her arms, which she accomplished in a somewhat exaggerated manner, most of the time with her back to the audience and almost in the wings, whereas offstage she is an arrogant, malicious, shrewd, and very intelligent female who always frightens me. It was rather inconsiderate to put her on the stage for the first time in that kind of part.

At the end of the second act—of course even the worst play has moments when one becomes personally involved, and perhaps some other evening I might have sat it out—nothing could persuade me to stay and I rushed home without saying goodbye, thus missing one or two acts of *Josette* and a farce entitled *In Mufti*, but instead getting sooner into the fresh air and earlier to bed. At home with my sister I again began cursing this journey, and since she was very keen to come with me (not only to prove to me that the journey isn't so

terrible), I gladly promised to take her. Although this decision was not taken until 10:30 at night, my father, surprisingly enough, raised no objections, which can only be explained by the fact that we have relatives in Leitmeritz, and my father is always very anxious to maintain family connections, and for this purpose my sister strikes him as a more suitable choice than I. So we left together in the morning; the weather was still fine, but by the time we were in the coach it was raining into our faces, and from then on it never stopped. I was in court continuously until 2 o'clock (no decision was reached, the case had to be adjourned once more, but I'd rather be flogged than come out here again), my sister continuously with our relatives. She is a little inhibited about writing (fundamentally not unlike me), which is why she only signed her name. But she is not lazy, as you seem to think; my other two sisters were the lazy ones, or rather only the eldest. She was always to be found on the nearest sofa. Actually, Ottla works in our shop; she is there when it opens at 7:15 A.M. (my father doesn't turn up till 8:30), and stays for lunch which is brought to her there; she doesn't get home until four or five in the afternoon, and during the season may even stay on till closing time.

Her work, however, is not all that hard, and on the whole I don't know any girl who exerts herself the way you do, nor one whose exertions I should like to relieve more than, yours. But what am I capable of, anyhow? Kissing, yes, kissing from afar! Please tell me, dearest, in your very next letter, how you would answer Frl. Lindner if, instead of general questions, she were to ask point-blank: "Has this man actually been to Berlin once in the course of the past three months? He hasn't? And why not? He leaves Prague at noon on Saturday or, if that's not possible, then in the evening, spends Sunday in Berlin, and returns to Prague that night. It is a bit strenuous, but on the whole quite feasible. Why doesn't he do it?" Poor dearest, what would you say?

Franz

From February 6 to 7, 1913

Dearest, it's late and I am weary. I spent the afternoon at the office, hadn't slept, did some boring work, accident statistics (so that you shall know the name of this, too, and to my delight have your breath permeate every trifle that belongs to me), and the following hours were badly spent as well. (Ah, my cheeks are burning with exhaustion.) I walked out of the office with comparative gusto, passed Weltsch's house, saw a light in his room, assumed he was working, and thought this might be a suitable opportunity to go and disturb him, for I had not spoken to him for a long time. (No, you don't even know what he is. He is a Doctor of Law and a Doctor of Philosophy, an official at the university library, where he has nothing to do, and together with Max he is bringing out a philosophical work entitled *Intuition and Concept*,[42] which may appear before the end of the month.) Well, I went upstairs, found him as usual in an overheated room full of foul air, for his hypochondria lodges in his lungs and larynx; he seemed delighted to have been interrupted in his reading of an immensely complex book by Cohen—*The Logic of Pure Perception*,[43] if I am not mistaken—but I soon realized I wasn't going to be able to drag him out of that almost unbreathable air to come for a walk. Had we discussed general topics only, I should have succeeded fairly soon, but he derives great and, to me, incomprehensible satisfaction from reading to me intimate letters, both old and recent, at the slightest opportunity. And this opportunity presenting itself today, he opened his secret drawer where everything is kept tied in bundles in perfect order. Here lies everything concerning the most personal matters that can be preserved in writing, letters he has received, shorthand drafts of all letters he has written, exact data of every development, conversations in shorthand, shorthand reflections on all these things from the remote and remotest past. No doubt hardly a soul but Max and I knows anything about all this, for you must not imagine that W[eltsch] is loquacious, quite the contrary. But today he wanted to talk, and the more incomprehensible the satisfaction and comfort he derives from it become to me, the greater grows my patience to

suffer these readings and confidences. And when, in order to make me stay, he even brought himself, for my sake, to open the door to the cold adjacent room, I was powerless to resist, lay down on the sofa in my overcoat, and listened. I love him, but not at such times. —No more! A weary kiss—interminable, but not just from weariness.

Franz

From February 9 to 10, 1913

[Presumably during the night of February 7 to 8, 1913]

I am sitting down to write in a state of some confusion; I have been reading a lot of different things that are merging into one another, and if one hopes to find a solution for oneself by this kind of reading, one is mistaken; one comes up against a wall, and cannot proceed. Your life is so very different, dearest. Except in relation to your fellow men, have you ever known uncertainty? Have you ever observed how, within yourself and independent of other people, diverse possibilities open up in several directions, thereby actually creating a ban on your every movement? Have you ever, without giving the slightest thought to anyone else, been in despair simply about yourself? Desperate enough to throw yourself on the ground and remain there beyond the Day of Judgment? How devout are you? You go to the synagogue; but I dare say you have not been recently. And what is it that sustains you, the idea of Judaism or of God? Are you aware, and this is the most important thing, of a continuous relationship between yourself and a reassuringly distant, if possibly infinite height or depth? He who feels this continuously has no need to roam about like a lost dog, mutely gazing around with imploring eyes; he never need yearn to slip into a grave as if it were a warm sleeping bag and life a cold winter night; and when climbing the stairs to his office he never need imagine that he is careering down the well of the staircase, flickering in the uncertain light, twisting from the speed of his fall, shaking his head with impatience.

There are times, dearest, when I am convinced I am unfit for any human relationship. I am certainly devoted to my sister, and at the moment of my invitation I was genuinely pleased that she wanted to come with me to Leitmeritz; I was glad to give her the pleasure of this trip, and to be able to look after her properly, for to look after someone is my secret, everlasting desire, neither recognized nor credited, perhaps, by anyone around me—but when, after 3 or 4 hours of traveling together, sharing a coach, sharing breakfast, when I said goodbye to her at Leitmeritz to go to court, I was delighted, I heaved a sigh of relief; being alone again I felt an ease such as I never could feel in the presence of my sister. Why, dearest, why? Have you ever experienced anything remotely similar with someone you love? The circumstances were by no means exceptional, for we parted on the friendliest terms, and six hours later met again on the friendliest terms. Nor was it a unique occurrence; tomorrow, the day after, whenever it may be, the same thing will be repeated.—Dearest, to lie at your feet and be calm, that would be best.

Franz

February 9, 1913

Sunday afternoon, 6 o'clock, on the train

Why, oh why didn't I write last night! Here in the compartment among a lot of people, it will come to nothing. And all day long I was disturbed, dissatisfied, as though I had damaged my contact with you, which after all I need in order to live. Why, oh why did I allow myself to be led astray to go for this walk, when I knew I would only drag myself along like a shadow. But the weather was so lovely, and being rather desperate I thought: run along with them, maybe you'll feel better. After all, one of them has a fountain pen (the one I am writing with now), and so I thought I would somehow find an opportunity and a quiet moment to write to you. But no, no. I just managed to talk about Berlin every now and again, once about the Parlograph, that was all. And I do so need your nearness, my contact with you, but spoil it myself. Here, in the presence of the

four girls, I would like to kick myself for it in public. But wait (I am saying “wait” to myself): after all, this evening we shall be writing again and join each other properly once more. At least I have discovered how much I belong to you, in the city, in the train, on the highway, with strange grandparents, in the woods, on hillsides, wherever I walk or sit.—Last stop. This Sunday letter has come to an end. I return to the party, but hold on to your hand, please, in secret.

Franz

From February 9 to 10, 1913

Dearest, once again it is so late, and again it was really my fault (hurry! pen, so as to get me very close to Felice, my Felice, after this long time), but I couldn’t help it. I returned from the walk a broken man; I felt so loose in my skin that had anyone given me a shake I would have fallen out of it altogether. So I read aloud to my sister (my parents had spent the day with relatives in Kolin and had only just returned; welcoming them back also delayed me) something[44] dating from my good days, perhaps the best thing I have done; it was new to her, and came, I think, from the time I was waiting for your second letter. I grew quite hot from reading, and if I hadn’t spent the afternoon roaming the highways, who knows, I might be settling down and writing something decent that could raise me suddenly out of the depths into which I am perceptibly sinking. But it seems I shall do nothing of the sort, but go to bed just as I am, and certainly not write anything for a long time, and remain a plague to myself, to you, and to the world.

I did not write to you last night, it got too late because of “Michael Kohlhaas”[45] (have you read it? If not, don’t! *I* shall read it to you!); apart from a short section which I had read the day before, I read it in one sitting. Probably for the tenth time. This is a story I read with true piety; it carries me along on waves of wonder, and if it weren’t for the rather weak, in part carelessly written ending, it would be a thing of perfection, the kind of perfection I like to

maintain does not exist. (For I believe that even the greatest works of literature have a little tail of human frailty which, if one is on the lookout for it, begins to wag slightly and disturbs the sublime, godlike quality of the whole.)

Dearest, please tell me why you chose to love such an unhappy young man, whose unhappiness in the long run is bound to be contagious? During today's outing I walked with a sensible, decent girl, whom I have always rather liked. But I felt quite nauseated by the way she complained of her life. (I meet her once every 3 months.) Later, however, when we were all at supper and an amusing young man began to tease her, her repartee was as quick as a flash, and she outwitted him. I must emanate an aura of unhappiness. But don't worry, dearest, and stay with me! Very close to me!

Franz

From February 10 to 11, 1913

I went to the Brods' again this evening, and even if it may have been a mistake to stay so late instead of going home and doing something sensible, or of pretending to myself to be doing something sensible, I felt too much at ease with them—I who so rarely feel at ease with people—to make up my mind to get up from the sofa and say goodbye. Besides, Weltsch was also there, and we laughed a lot; now, two hours later, I simply cannot understand how I was able to laugh; I can search myself through and through and find no trace of a cause for laughter within myself. What could it have been that amused me so much?

Sophie, who is very amiable to me and from the very beginning has been in the habit of embarrassing me, even if unintentionally, by stroking or taking hold of my hand during a conversation, had nothing to say about you today; she just kept on talking about her husband, about telegrams, express letters, and telephone conversations. "And Felice?" I asked with my eyes, but she did not understand me. Only once were you mentioned, naturally without

anyone having noticed. In the midst of some other conversation I said to Sophie: “What was it I wanted to ask you?” I repeated this several times, which sounded rather stupid, but it did seem as though I couldn’t remember. But what else could I do? I couldn’t very well suddenly yell: “Now that’s enough! From now on I want to hear only about Felice, and nothing else!” That was what I wanted, believe me. After all, I had received your huge letter this morning (but while reading it, my heart beating with joy and comfort, I kept imagining the lovely Sunday weather outside your window, and you indoors in your room, bent over the letter), and it made me feel a man of importance, but men of importance are all the more insatiable.

Dearest, you evaded the big question. I don’t want to touch with even a single thought the joy of the hours to be spent with you. If everything were to take place in accordance with my feelings for you at my best moments, then Berlin, where we shall be side by side, would not be in Berlin, but in the clouds. But this is not what Frl. Lindner is meant to ask; all she is meant to ask is why I, who force myself upon you with letters, refrain from doing so in person. And you are meant to give her one part of the answer, and perhaps withhold the other. After all, she might so easily ask. Will you then simply say and think: “I don’t know”?

From the picture, and from everything else I have heard about her, I imagined your sister Toni quite unlike your present description. She struck me as sleepy, dull, and sad, and now she is just the opposite. And quick witted, too—a quality I both admire and flee from. I still know very little about your sister Erna, only the charming childhood stories.—Please, dearest, wouldn’t you lend me the list of your books for one day? Now that I am more or less familiar with your room, I want to creep a little way into your cupboards as well.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] The address on today's letter was rather illegible; it frightened me, even in retrospect.

From February 11 to 12, 1913

Dearest one, yet again it is late; without accomplishing anything I stay awake from ancient habit, as though waiting for the rain from heaven that fails to appear.

Hardly had you described our meeting in Berlin when I dreamed about it! All kinds of things, but by now I have hardly anything definite to say about it, all that remains within me is the general feeling of a mixture of sorrow and joy which the dream left behind. We went walking in the streets, the neighborhood strangely resembled the Altstadter Ring in Prague; it was after 6 o'clock in the evening (possibly the actual time of the dream); although not walking arm in arm, we were closer to each other than one is when walking arm in arm. Oh God, how difficult it is to describe on paper the invention I had made for walking not arm in arm, not attracting attention, and yet very close to you; when we went along the Graben that time, I could have shown you, but it did not occur to us then. You were hurrying straight to your hotel, and I was stumbling along on the edge of the sidewalk, two feet away from you. How on earth can I describe how we walked in my dream? When walking arm in arm, the arms touch in only two places, and each person preserves his independence; but as we walked our shoulders also touched, and our arms were in contact all the way down. But wait, I'll draw it. This is arm in arm:

But this is how we walked:

How do you like my drawing? I was once a great draftsman, you know, but then I started to take academic drawing lessons with a

bad woman painter and ruined my talent. Think of that! But wait, one of these days I'll send you a few of my old drawings, to give you something to laugh at. These drawings gave me greater satisfaction in those days—it's years ago—than anything else.

Dearest, don't you have any faith whatever in my business ability? Don't you expect anything to come of my suggestions concerning the Parlograph? You actually haven't said a word in reply to what I wrote you about it. Can't you see how this humiliates me? It's almost as though the moment you had assigned me a place in your office, you decided to throw me out again. Pick wrote to me again today. I enclose his letter to show you the pressure he is putting on me, and how you are letting me down. And even if everything I have said about it so far is a joke (on paper it almost looks as if it were meant seriously), I still have to give Pick some sort of answer. Perhaps he hopes to make a lot of money, will really make an effort, and eventually achieve a few sales. So wake up, dearest! To business! Whatever it may be that drives you toward me is to my advantage, for it gives me you to hang on to.

Franz

*Enclosed*:
*Otto Pick to Franz Kafka*

Prague, February 10, 1913

Dear Herr Doctor,

I will continue to have the review of your *Meditation* reprinted until the first sentence is correct. In the enclosed copy of the *Pester Lloyd* there is, as you see, a blank.[46] Don't hold it against me!

But what about our P.[arlograph]?! Please come and see me one day, if possible with prospectuses. I have also got Kisch[47] from the *Bohemia* interested in the project. The bankers, however, want to see a real P. in action before starting negotiations!

On the 21st I am lecturing on L. Schüler,[48] but without Dahlmann.[49] She is not free that evening. I hope you will come all the same; and if possible see me before then.

Kind regards, yours, Otto Pick

From February 12 to 13, 1913

It is best of all when your letter arrives first thing, as it did today; then the entire day, from its very beginning, belongs to you. But when your letter arrives later, or not until I get home, then half the day doesn't know to whom it belongs, and begins to totter till it gives me a headache. But there must be other reasons for my headaches as well, for I have them almost permanently now. I'm afraid I walk too little, sleep too little, and that little badly; in short, I live as though I were writing well, which of course, were it true, would have the effect of curing all ills and making me happy into the bargain. But I am not writing at all, and am like an old horse shut up in its stable.

Look here, we are again answering or anticipating each other's questions simultaneously overnight. On Friday evening, without realizing it was Friday, I asked about your prayers, whereupon you went to the synagogue that very Friday. Yesterday I asked when I am likely to receive the prospectuses, and today I have the answer, though it isn't very satisfactory. (How is Pick to go about it then, if he is determined to do business? Should he get in touch with Adler? And how?) And finally in yesterday's letter Lasker-Schüler was mentioned, and today you ask about her. I cannot bear her poems; their emptiness makes me feel nothing but boredom, and their contrived verbosity nothing but antipathy. Her prose I find just as tiresome and for the same reasons; it is the work of an indiscriminate brain twitching in the head of an overwrought city-dweller. But I may be quite wrong; many people love her, including Werfel, who talks of her with genuine enthusiasm. Yes, she is in a bad way; I believe her second husband has left her; they are collecting for her here, too; I had to give 5 kronen, without feeling the slightest sympathy for her. I don't quite know why, but I always imagine her simply as a drunk, dragging herself through the coffeehouses at night. As you will see from Pick's letter, he is giving a lecture about her, and for her benefit.

You know, dearest, I must be careful not to talk about strangers in my letters to you, in particular about people I find disagreeable. As though to revenge themselves for my criticism, having calmly allowed themselves to be described, they suddenly (since they can no longer be removed) start spreading themselves all over the place and try to hide you from my view, dearest, with their loathsome or uninteresting appearance. Away with you, Lasker-Schüler! Come here, dearest! No one is to be between us, no one around us. You are right; a sister doesn't belong to one entirely, and one may be allowed to get tired of her. But what happens if one lacks the power to win a person entirely?

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] What did the professor say when you made the suggestion about your sister Erna?

February 13, 1913

I stood by the balcony door for a long time, looking outside for an answer to the question whether or not to go to Dresden. Though indeed I don't know what you are doing in Dresden, whether you are going with your mother, whether you have some special business (which the suddenness of the journey would suggest, as well as the fact that you seem to intend to spend the night in Dresden), in which case I would be in your way, even if I were only to wait for you outside the hotel, and try to take up a position from which I could see you eating your lunch. But in actual fact such considerations would not prevent me from going. It is rather the state I am in, which even here at home among my family assigns me to my dark room rather than to the brightly lit living room, which makes this kind of journey in itself an immense undertaking; and since you, dearest, would be the object of this journey, a dangerous undertaking as well, for what would you say, what would your sister say, if, catching sight of me for the first time, she were to see me as I am! No, no, no. I shall stay where I am, only a little sadder than

usual, a little more troubled, for you are nearer than usual and yet beyond my reach. Old people, little old ladies would decide to take this short journey without a moment's hesitation, but I can't.

Farewell, dearest, and spend a few peaceful hours. Forgive me for persecuting you with letters even in Dresden. A Sunday letter is awaiting you in Berlin, there's nothing new in it, just the endless litany of the past week.

Franz

From February 13 to 14, 1913

Today's letter didn't arrive until the second mail. Does this mean that your eye was still inflamed in the morning, and you didn't go to the office? But in this case perhaps you would have told me in a short postscript? Was it really only a speck of dust or a hair that got into your eye? That would irritate but surely not inflame the eye? And isn't there anyone who knows how to fold back the eyelid so that the eye can be cleaned? Although major and bloody operations didn't use to worry me much, I would never be able to carry out, or even witness, such minor manipulations being performed on the body, for they remind me or make me aware or make me believe that the human frame is horribly primitive, and includes so much that is mechanical within the organic. Perhaps you too are afraid to have your eyelid folded back? The thought that this task, albeit perfectly harmless, should be performed on you really makes me shudder.

Dearest, today would be a good opportunity for the following promise: You undertake, and name a reliable surety for this undertaking, to write and tell me about any indisposition—distant worries do little to prevent them—at once, clearly and truthfully, and in such a way that no graver interpretation, in addition to the actual written words, can spring to mind. Please understand that I am not even asking you to exaggerate for the worse and make the exaggeration a transparent one, as I normally do—admittedly less out of consideration for you than on account of my temperament.

Yesterday I received the proofs of your short story [“The Judgment”]. How beautifully our names unite below the title! When you eventually read the story, I hope you won’t regret ever having consented to your name being mentioned (of course it is only Felice B.). For no one, no matter to whom you may show it, could like the story. You can take comfort, at least some kind of comfort, from the fact that I would have added your name even had you forbidden it, for the dedication, although only a tiny and dubious one, is nevertheless an unquestionable sign of my love for you, and this love exists not by permission, but from compulsion.—In any case, there is still plenty of time for you to protest; the publication of the book has been delayed, it will be months before it comes out.——

Dearest! Please note how a time of not writing—it seems to stretch endlessly ahead—confuses me. The entire evening I had been looking forward to writing to you, and now that I am doing it, I am tired, or behaving as though I were, and close my letter with dull eyes, and pursed lips.

Franz

From February 14 to 15, 1913

Even if I had not intended for some days to go to the theater this evening to see *Hidalla*[50] (Wedekind and his wife are in it, of course), I would inevitably have had to do so, dearest, after your second letter today. For no matter how far apart we are, and no matter how little anyone notices it or at any rate wants to believe it, we are linked by a strong cord, even if it should not please God to turn it into an encircling chain. But if you go to *Professor Bernhardi*, dearest, you drag me along by that inevitable cord, and there is a danger that we both succumb to that kind of bad literature, which the greater part of Schnitzler[51] represents for me. But to guard ourselves against this danger it was my duty not to give way completely to the tug of the cord, and to go to *Hidalla* instead, to steer you away from the *Professor* a little and let a few true, well-cut Wedekindian words reach your heart, beating as it does for *Professor*

*Bernhardi*. Thus, without any damage to the soul, I may be able to bear the Schnitzlerian impressions which are blowing toward me this evening, and which I am absorbing greedily because they come from you, dearest. For I don't like Schnitzler at all, and hardly respect him; no doubt he is capable of certain things, but for me his great plays and his great prose are full of a truly staggering mass of the most sickening drivel. It is impossible to be too hard on him. Those plays of his that I have seen (*Interlude*, *The Call of Life*, *Medardus*) dissolved even before my watching eyes, and I forgot them while listening to them. Only when looking at his photograph —that bogus dreaminess, that sentimentality I wouldn't touch even with the tips of my fingers—can I see how he could have developed in this way from his partly excellent early work (*Anatol*, *La Ronde*, *Lieutenant Gustl*).—Wedekind I won't even mention in the same letter.

Enough, enough! Let me quickly get rid of Schnitzler who is trying to come between us, like Lasker-Schüler the other day. Dearest, did you go to the theater alone? And why so suddenly? Does this mean that your eye is all right, quite all right again? After supper just now I saw a picture of your new princely bridal couple in the evening paper.[52] The two of them walking in a park in Karlsruhe, arm in arm; but not satisfied with that, their fingers are intertwined as well. If I didn't stare at those intertwined fingers for five minutes, then it must have been ten minutes.

This afternoon I could have done with a hole to disappear into; for in the current issue of *März* I read Max's review of my book;[53] I knew it was coming out, but had not seen it. A few reviews have already appeared, needless to say all of them by friends, valueless in their exaggerated praise, valueless in their comments, and explicable only as a sign of misguided friendship, an overrating of the printed word, a misunderstanding of the general public's attitude to literature. Ultimately that is what, on the whole, they have in common with the majority of reviews, and if they did not act as a sad though quickly spent spur to one's vanity, one might easily accept them. But Max's review is more than excessive. Just because his friendship for me, in its most human aspect, has roots

far deeper than those of literature, and for this reason is effective long before literature gets a chance, he overestimates me to a degree that makes me feel embarrassed, and vain, and conceited, whereas with his literary experience and powers of discernment, he has at his disposal vast reserves of genuine judgment, which is nothing but judgment. Nevertheless, that is how he writes. If I myself were working, were in the flow of work and borne along by it, I wouldn't have to give a thought to the review; in my mind I could kiss Max for his love, and the review itself would not affect me in any way! But as things are—— And the dreadful thing is that I have to say to myself that my attitude to Max's work is no different than his to mine, except that sometimes I am aware of it, whereas he never is.

But are there really no pleasanter Sunday thoughts for you in my silly head, dearest, dearest! If I did not know that all the evil flowing from me toward you were inevitably turned to good by you, best of creatures—honestly, I shouldn't tell you these things.

I enclose a letter from my Madrid uncle [Alfred Löwy] (he is 60 years old, director of railways) for your kind consideration. Wouldn't you too, dearest, let me read an occasional letter from one of your relatives, from your sister in Budapest, for instance, or the one in Dresden? So that I can begin to understand the circle around you into which I have insinuated myself. Nor have I received your list of books yet. Can one ask too much even of the person one loves? If I do, dearest, then say so. It would be a poor exchange if, by my acquiring knowledge of you, your heart were to develop some resistance, however small.

Franz

February 16, 1913

Dearest, just a few words in the greatest haste so as to be with you by the first mail. Please forget the letter you received yesterday,[54] the greater part of which was so unpleasant. I wouldn't have mailed it if it hadn't been so late at night and I'd had, or been capable of, another letter. But the regularity of our correspondence overrode all

other considerations. What's more, I may have felt—a cunning excuse—the resistance you felt, at least at that time, to one of my Sunday letters. But whatever it may be, I have amply atoned for that letter, and perhaps for a great many other things as well during the night, the greater part of which, despite immense sleepiness, I spent awake owing to a beastly brand-new pain in my right shoulder, which even made me resort to prayer. But it has gone again now, and I accept it gladly as a penance. What nonsense am I talking again, providing myself with material for further penance. I am a very unhappy human being and you, dearest, simply had to be summoned to create an equilibrium for all this misery.

Franz

February 16, 1913

Again, dearest, only a few hurried words. I slept a little, then lay awake for a very long time, so it's late. I hope your Sunday was pleasanter than mine. In front of me lies a postcard from Max and Elsa [Brod] from Saint-Raphaël on the Riviera, or rather the Côte d'Azur. Actually, I asked them[55] to find a place for me for the autumn where it is hot, where one can live as a vegetarian, where one feels permanently well, where even alone and with no one to talk to, one does not feel forsaken (not that one really has to be alone), where even a blockhead can pick up some Italian, etc., in short, a beautiful, impossible place. Now Max says Saint-Raphaël is just that. What do you think, dearest?

Well, now I shall run a little way toward you, though of course only as far as the station.

Franz

From February 16 to 17, 1913

Dearest, this evening on my long walk alone in the cold (have I caught a chill again? Real or imaginary shivers are running down my back) through the town, this way and that, over Hradčany,

around the cathedral, and through the Belvedere, I wrote endless letters to you in my mind. And although you cannot have learned any details from this kind of writing, you must have realized once again, dearest (if not, I wouldn't know what to do), that I, above and beneath all the things I write to you, things which, considering the moods and states of weakness making up my existence, easily may appear repulsive, artificial, superficial, coquettish, false, malicious, incoherent, or rather not appear, they undeniably are so —that I nevertheless, nevertheless, deep down in the depth which is occasionally closed even to myself, recognize all the bad things I do and write, I assess them correctly, and weep with helplessness. That you love me, Felice, certainly makes me happy, but it doesn't make me feel safe, for you might be deluding yourself; with my letters I may be performing some kind of trick that deludes you. After all, you have hardly seen me, hardly heard me talk, hardly suffered from my silences, know nothing about the accidental or inevitable unpleasantnesses my presence might cause you. My safety rests far more in the fact that *I* love you, that during that short evening I recognized you for what you are, felt gripped by you, that I did not shrink from this love but passed this test, that this love has become integrated with my nature as though it had been born with me, but had only now been recognized.

Do not delude yourself, dearest, about the fright you had on learning that your mother had read my letters. (But what a strange man your father is! He looks sedate and serious, loves a gay life, weeps over novels, stands up for you against your mother in this seemingly very dubious affair!) Actually, it was not your mother you were frightened of. I'm afraid it was not that; just try and think about it. After all, your position within the family is independent enough; your mother had read my letters once before, and as far as I know there were no particular consequences. The actual effect of this news was rather that the small (in reality, my God, immensely vast) space into which you, dearest, had come to join me (just as now in your dream you leaped over the balustrade in dreamy recklessness to the man standing below) had now been pierced by your mother's cold objective eye; this had made you shudder and

caused you to wonder—by allowing you to view from afar that which hitherto you had seen only from very close quarters. If only we were alone again, and never disturbed!

Franz

From February 17 to 18, 1913

Just imagine, dearest, my misery, my rage, my anxiety, my worry, my love. I was with the Brods this evening in their new apartment (Sophie has been gone for ages, Max returns on Thursday), then went quietly for a walk, looking forward to being able to write to you soon in peace, to going to bed soon and ridding myself of my weariness and my cold by means of a tremendous sleep. Then whom should I meet but Pick, and he drags me along (since I never meet people except as a representative of my Institute, I imagine I have to give in to everyone), and so off I go, and we fritter away the night, though not exactly bored, sitting in a coffeehouse; what's more, in an empty, unheated coffeehouse, and now at 2:30 A.M. I am sitting in my room, and, in spite of its warmth, cold air is running across my back, heaven knows where from.

Dearest, there is one thing I have to tell you, though; you must have read my Sunday letter[56] rather carelessly; there is no other possibility; there was unpleasantness enough in that letter (one day I'll explain this to you) and I'm glad about the careless reading, and beg you not to re-read it—but there cannot, could not have been so much as a word about a possible *breaking* of the cord that joins us. Dearest, I am not so crazy as to pass judgment on myself, or even to hint at it—on myself who is more part of you than my picture that hangs from your neck. How could you have read anything of the kind into my letter? With what kind of eyes did you read it?

And what hand, in what dream, made you write that I have won you completely? Dearest, that's what you believe for a brief moment, at a distance. To win you at close quarters, and for good, requires greater strength than the play of muscles that drives my pen. Don't you yourself believe this, when you think about it? It

does seem to me sometimes that this communication by letter, beyond which I have an almost constant longing for reality, is the only kind of communication in keeping with my wretchedness (my wretchedness which of course I do not always feel as wretchedness), and that the transgression of this limit imposed on me would lead us both to disaster. Dearest, I have enough imagination to say to myself that I, when thinking only of myself, must stay with you, pressed firmly to you, and never let go; equally, when thinking only of you (how we blend, you and I, but in my mind how inseparable, that's the worst of it), I should do all in my power to keep away from you. Oh God, how will this end!—Now, my dearest Felice, here I am about to mail this dreadful letter, but it is now past 3 o'clock and I cannot write another. I only want to add that everything you dislike about the last one is neither true nor meant that way; though of course it is perfectly true, and also meant that way, but I love you so much that if you demand it with so much as a glance, I can also say what is untrue and, what's more, believe it. There are times, Felice, when I feel you have so much power over me that I think you could change me into a man capable of doing the obvious.

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

February 18, 1913

Dearest, I offended you with yesterday's letter. At the very mouth of the mailbox I wanted to withdraw it, but tell me what I am to do when a moment like yesterday's suddenly comes over me, in the middle of the night at that. Don't I have to write it down, or should I keep it to myself? In the last few days something inside me has certainly not been quite right, sentences I don't want keep thrusting themselves into my letters; it's as though they came from outside, and yet they must surely stem from an obscure source within. Dearest, please ignore it, suffer it in silence, or reproach me, but stay with me, and don't be sad, and don't cry, and keep me with you.

Franz

From February 18 to 19, 1913

Help me, dearest, I beg you, to put right the damage I have done in the last few days. Perhaps in fact nothing whatever has happened, and you wouldn't have noticed anything if I hadn't shouted about it, but I am driven by this feeling of anxiety in the midst of my lethargy, and I write, or fear I may at any moment write, irresponsible things. The wrong sentences lie in wait about my pen, twine themselves around its point, and are dragged along into the letters. I am not of the opinion that one can ever lack the power to express perfectly what one wants to write or say. Observations on the weakness of language, and comparisons between the limitations of words and the infinity of feelings, are quite fallacious. The infinite feeling continues to be as infinite in words as it was in the heart. What is clear within is bound to become so in words as well. This is why one need never worry about language, but at sight of words may often worry about oneself.[57] After all, who knows within himself how things really are with him? This tempestuous or floundering or morasslike inner self is what we really are, but by the secret process by which words are forced out of us, our self-knowledge is brought to light, and though it may still be veiled, yet it is there before us, wonderful or terrible to behold.

So protect me, dearest, from these horrible words of which I have recently been delivering myself. Tell me that you understand it all, and yet go on loving me. The other day I wrote some offensive things about Lasker-Schüler and Schnitzler. How very right I was! And yet they both soar like angels over the abyss in which I lie prostrate. And Max's praise! He doesn't actually praise my book; after all, the book exists, and his judgment could be examined, should anyone feel so inclined; but it is me he praises, and this is the most ridiculous of all. For where am I? Who can examine me? I wish I had a strong hand for the sole purpose of thrusting it into this incoherent construction that I am. And yet what I am saying here is not even precisely my opinion, not even precisely my opinion at this

moment. When I look into myself I see so much that is obscure and still in flux that I cannot even properly explain or fully accept the dislike I feel for myself.

Dearest, what do you say when you come face to face with such chaos? Is it not sadder and more repellent for the observer than for him who experiences it? Certainly, incomparably sadder and more repellent. I can imagine the strength it must take not to run away from it. While I, as I freely admit, write it all down quite calmly.

Franz

From February 19 to 20, 1913

I who am so accustomed to toying with imaginary ideas that I cannot discard the habit in real life, even when the menacing heartbeat is there to remind me that this time it is real life—I am greatly saddened, dearest, by your remark about my journey to the South. I did not, as you seem to think, submit the plan simply for your advice (because as far as I am concerned it makes no difference where I go, for with the exception of a few surprising moments, I won't feel well anywhere), and even though I knew that in the end it would be no more than advice, which I was prepared to accept as a blessing for my journey—nevertheless, between the one kind of advice and the other, I miss the connecting link, without which my imagination cannot be appeased, since with an indestructible and desperate yearning it wants to pull you along.

Has the bad day passed, and your suffering ceased? How deeply you can sympathize, and how deeply you are shaken by sympathy! In precisely the same or even worse circumstances I should undoubtedly have stood by unmoved; on the other hand, I could neither have made the girl pour out her grief to such an extent, nor soothed her as much by my presence, as you certainly did—I can feel it in my own heart—although you do not mention it. What latent strength you have, dearest! The fact that you yourself are overwhelmed by it only proves its greatness. I cannot comfort anyone, because words fail me, but words are not capricious. Words

do not fail one out of caprice. In the past, when I had less insight into myself and thought I could not disregard the world for a single moment, on the childish assumption that this was where the danger lay, and that the “I” would adjust automatically, without trouble or hesitation, according to the observations made in the outside world —at that time, no, not really even then, it was rather that I was always sunk within myself, then as now. The only difference is that today there are moments (a substitute for the past erroneous assumptions) when I imagine myself writing these things at the foot and in the shadow of a mountain, whose summit I may one day be allowed to reach by climbing or soaring.

But for some time now I have not answered a single question, no longer write anything real, just because the unreal is threatening to obscure the most beautiful reality, and I must try, by means of writing, to drive it away. Dearest, be patient (just now I hear, it is getting on for 2 o’clock, cannon fire, one shot after another; I don’t know any reason for it and am trembling and my cheeks are icy cold, as though it directly concerned us, you and me). It is quiet again. Well, patience, dearest. I dare not ask more, but that in itself is an enormity.

Franz

From February 20 to 21, 1913

Late, late. Wasted another evening with various people. Without support—since I am not writing, and you are in Berlin—I allow myself to be dragged wherever anyone pleases. A young woman talked about her wild little boy, and this was really the best part of it, but I couldn’t really bear even that, my eyes shot indifferent—though I found her attractive—glances at her and I probably embarrassed her with these mechanical eye movements; I bit my lips to stop my attention from wandering, yet in spite of all my efforts I wasn’t there at all, but was definitely nowhere else, either; so perhaps I didn’t exist at all during those two hours? That must be

it, for my presence would have been more convincing had I been asleep in my chair.

But to make up for it I had a pleasant morning. When I went to the office I still felt everything was so beastly and boring that on my way, although it was not particularly late, I suddenly broke into a trot, and for no other reason than to bring a little motion into the vileness of the world, thereby making it more bearable. But when I had your letter and read what I had been hoping to read all through the night—that you want to come with me to Saint-Raphaël, or are at least considering it, then the world in which such things are still possible began to take on a look it hasn't had for weeks on end. So you would come with me, we would be there together, we would stand side by side at the railings on the seafront, sit side by side on a bench under palm trees, everything that happened would be happening "side by side." The very heart in which I have longed to find shelter from everything and forever would be beating at my side. I can still feel shudders running down my face. Imagining the impossible must be like this; anyway you only wrote it as a fairy tale: "I shall look for a pretty little place for you, and then I shall leave you alone." Listen, dearest, the very impossibility of it is in keeping with the way you express it, for even if one after another the miracles, which are a prerequisite for a trip together, should come to pass, and we were standing beside the train that was due to leave for Genoa the very next minute—I should have to stay behind after all, it would be my unquestionable duty. In my present state, for example, or in recognition of the permanent possibility of being in such a state, I could never dare wish to be your traveling companion. Alone, in the corner of a compartment, that's where I belong; that's where I should stay. My contact with you, which I am trying to maintain with my last ounce of strength, must never be endangered by such a traveling companionship.

Franz

From February 21 to 22, 1913

Today I was wondering what, supposing I were you, my idea of myself would be if I had nothing to go on but last week's letters, apart from the—for you rather unimpressive—hour of our actual meeting. They are surely of a kind to refute and make one forget whatever may have been constructive in earlier letters, even though when writing them I felt the desire, admittedly impotent, to make them even more incisive in this very respect; in fact I could hardly re-read one of these letters without repugnance, primarily because—apart from all the other more obvious reasons—I didn't feel stung by them, either deeply enough or often enough. Wouldn't these letters inevitably destroy any idea you may have of me? If proof were not there before you, could you imagine, judging from your past experiences, a human being leading as useless a life as I do, and who *is alive nevertheless*, and by being alive achieves no more than to run around an enormous hole and to guard it. Doesn't this almost make you believe, dearest, that rather than a human being it is some misguided spirit that is writing to you?

And yet it is a human being that is writing to you, dearest. (Having been presumptuous enough to say this, he hardly knows how to describe the consequences of being a human being; they are far and away beyond him.) He strives toward you and gathers his miserable forces for that purpose, and finds the distance to Berlin by no means so hard to bear as the height separating him from you. And in spite of all his good intentions the only thing he will achieve will be "to keep on disappointing you over and over again," as you say in today's letter (albeit in another connection, but it comes about automatically, and unintentionally on your part, that these remarks refer to me). There is nothing else he can do, for we have no powers other than those with which we were turned out into the world, and even when our lives are at stake we cannot procure new ones from some obscure reserves.

Neither in the office nor in the tram could you write to me. Shall I tell you why, dearest? You didn't know whom to write to. I am no target for letters. If I would, or could, appear quite calmly before you to the full extent of my wretched condition, you would shrink back. Instead—of course without intention—I run around in circles

like those mad squirrels in their cages, with the sole purpose, dearest, of keeping you there in front of my cage, and to know you are near me, even if I cannot see you. How long will it take you to see through it all, and once you have done so, how long will you stay?

Franz

*Presumably enclosed*:
These are the fantasies or the wishes I indulge in when lying sleepless in bed:

To be a large piece of wood, and to be pressed against her body by the cook, who with both hands draws the knife toward her along the side of this stiff log (approximately in the region of my hip) and with all her might slices off shavings to light the fire.

February 23, 1913

Only a few words, dearest, for I'm late, and I would like to get a little fresh air before going to see Max. As seemed fitting (for I should be either in bed or in Dresden), I spent most of the day in bed, and the only two, though terrible, adventures were caused by my father who gradually, and despite all resistance, dragged me firmly out of my morning sleep back into this bleak world with his insane, monotonous, incessant shouting, singing, and hand-clapping, which he repeated over and over again with renewed force to amuse a great-nephew, while in the afternoon he carried on in the same way to entertain his grandson. Dearest one, it takes considerable virtue to endure these goings-on without unfilial oaths, although it may be understandable (it's my father's only pleasure), but in one's soul quite incomprehensible (to me tribal dances are less incomprehensible). Imagine battering at someone like that! In the afternoon especially, every shout was like a punch in the eye. And then to think that many years ago I was being entertained in the same way. In those days, however, there was no one next door being made to suffer from it. And yet it may not even be the

shouting that puts such a strain on me; altogether it requires strength to tolerate children in the apartment. I can't do it, I can't forget myself, my blood refuses to flow, it becomes congealed, and this desire of the blood, after all, is supposed to represent love for children. I am wondering whether to leave home and take a room somewhere on account of my nephew's and my niece's occasional presence; after all, they are growing up and getting noisier and noisier. Once, years ago, though for different reasons, I came very close to moving out, but in the end I let them stop me.

Where are you today, dearest? I seem to have lost sight of you. Are you staying on in Dresden, or returning this evening? It has been a lovely day and I wandered around Dresden many times in my half-sleep. In my subsequent awakening I began adding up my present real and imaginary ills (the effect, of course, is no different provided the powers of imagination are strong enough) and arrived at a total of 6, which would be reason enough for sulking and head-hanging, were it not for you, dearest, you who can bear this accumulation of suffering, for which the reward as well as the penalty could only be an endless shower of kisses.

Franz

From February 23 to 24, 1913

First of all, dearest, so as not to keep on postponing it (perhaps it has already been worrying you), I am returning your little niece's picture. Yes, that child deserves to be loved. That anxious look, as though all the horrors of the world were on view there in the studio! And yet her hands are resting on the arm of the chair and on her hip, just like a *grande dame*, proof of her unselfconsciousness. And I will even risk contradicting my afternoon letter and declare that I love little Wilma sitting on her cushion. (But of course who can say whether it is not just for your sake?) Is the picture in your locket a different one? And could I see that one as well?

I was very much amused, I might almost say—don't get me wrong—shaken, by your sister's letter. Not because she subordinates

herself entirely to her child, she doesn't do so in a particularly characteristic fashion—but because in it a candid disposition displays itself in a veritable flood, an inconceivable quantity of small, coherent, but above all monotonous detail. The remarks about the brothers and sisters—the enumeration of the presents—the enumeration of the customs charges. Dearest, please don't misunderstand me: when I make these comments it has nothing whatever to do with the regard, even respect, I naturally feel for your sister. I am always roused when seemingly and legitimately there is nothing to enjoy. I am thinking of the evening before last when, fully occupied with my own misery, I saw an acquaintance, the owner or rather the son of the owner of a Jewish bookshop, stepping out of the front door of a house just in front of me. He must be 40 years old by now; once, years ago, he was engaged to a big hefty girl; then the engagement was broken off because he didn't get enough money. Later, but also many years ago, he married a delicate, very lively woman. I remember them coming to see us in our old apartment, and the way this woman talked in a strange, disjointed fashion. It seems to me now almost as though she used to wear a train, even in broad daylight, which she kept kicking to one side with her foot. A few weeks later this woman went mad—they say the husband, or rather the husband's parents, were largely to blame—was sent to an asylum, the marriage was dissolved, and the husband, despite his resistance, had to return the greater part of the dowry (much to my father's satisfaction, since he followed this particular family's affairs with interest, though not without malicious pleasure). Thus the man was free again, but did not remarry, probably because his parents, to whom he was infinitely devoted, no longer demanded it. He was never independent, but ever since leaving school, that is, for a small eternity, he has been sitting in this tiny shop where there is hardly enough work for one person, and with the help of an assistant he dusts the prayer shawls on display; when the weather is warm he stands in the open doorway (he used to take turns with his parents, but now they are frequently ill), when it's cold he stands behind the book-covered door, and through the gaps between the books, mostly obscene, he

gazes out into the street. He considers himself a German, is a member of the local German Casino which, though open to all, is considered among local Germans the most exclusive club, and probably every evening when the shop is shut and he has had dinner, he goes to the Deutsche Haus. And this is what he was doing the night before last when I happened to catch sight of him as he was leaving his house. He walked along ahead of me just as I remember him as a young man. His back is remarkably broad, and his walk so peculiar and stiff that one cannot tell whether he is merely stiff or actually deformed; in any case, he is very bony and his lower jaw, for instance, is enormous. Well, can you imagine, dearest, can you actually imagine (*tell me!*) what made me follow this man greedily along Zeltnergasse, turn off behind him into the Graben, and with infinite pleasure watch him disappear through the door of the Deutsche Haus?

It's late, you use a phrase, Felice, for which you have no need; give it to me, and let me say: "Go on loving me!"

Franz

From February 24 to 25, 1913

Your sister? And I, always stubbornly caught up in my own misery, had no idea, and in the letter I sent to Dresden I wished you, my poor heart, "peaceful hours" there. Had I known then approximately what I know now of the purpose of your journey to Dresden, I probably would have come to Dresden despite my condition, for even in all my apathy I could hardly have tolerated the thought of you being there alone and unhappy. It did just strike me the other day that your sister was about to leave her good job in Dresden, and that you were trying to find her a similar, very special position with some professors, etc., in Berlin—but I dismissed it. I don't even want to know what it is all about, dearest, if it is difficult for you to tell me, unless there is the remotest possibility that I might be able to offer advice or help (it would be for you, after all, and that would give me strength and ingenuity)—but what I must know soon,

dearest—soon I say!—*is how you are.* Owing to me, quite enough has happened to upset you during this autumn and winter. And I cannot possibly take it to be a good sign that I have no news as yet about the success of your trip to Dresden, nor of the state you were in on your return journey. I definitely ought to have gone to Dresden; you might after all have found me useful in some way, and the sight of your distress would have made me capable of many things.

I hardly dare go on writing, for I don't really know what you are doing. If on Saturday and Sunday evening, thus at a time when all your thoughts were engaged on this journey, I could sit with Max in his new apartment, not essentially more miserable than usual, as though you were on some other planet and the ground under my feet were in no way connected to that upon which you were obviously wandering about in a state of great agitation—who knows how things are for you at this moment, while I coldly put down one word after another? Dearest, it's a miserable life, and only he who knows how to intervene with a whip can grasp it fully.

I don't want to warn you, dearest, against exposing yourself to such excitements, even if they should be unnecessary—how could I warn you against following your heart, since I would know no better than to do the same, but now back in Berlin—be less considerate and take care of yourself. Let everything slide for a while, your mother's meetings, your sister's dances, your needlework, your aunt, and sleep, sleep! Only in sleep is one among benevolent spirits; too much wakefulness plagues you to death.

Franz

From Febuary 25 to 26, 1913

Now, dearest, I am really helpless. I can see that you are miserable, and I don't know what is happening; you are weeping again, and there isn't a word I can say; you say you need advice, and I cannot give you any. That you too should now be drawn into some unhappiness unknown to me is truly in accord with the advances unhappiness has recently made all around me. Dearest, I do wish we

could be gone from here together. Why should we tolerate having been thrown upon this black prickly earth from some kind of heaven? Even as a child I used to stand in great admiration in front of a picture dealer's window, looking at a bad color print depicting the suicide of two lovers. A winter's night, with the moon visible between great clouds just for this last moment. The couple stood at the end of a small wooden landing-stage, about to take the decisive step. Together both the girl's foot, and the man's, strained toward the deep, and with a sigh of relief one felt they were within the grip of gravity. The only other thing I recall is that the girl had a fine, pale green, loosely fluttering veil wound around her bare head, while the man's dark coat was taut in the wind. Their arms were around each other, and their advance was so smooth and urgent that one couldn't say that she drew him, or that he pushed her, and one may have sensed vaguely even then, though one didn't realize it fully until later, that for love there may be no way out other than that depicted there. But being still a child at the time, I undoubtedly derived even greater amusement from the picture that usually hung next to this one, and which showed a wild boar emerging from the depth of the forest in one great leap to disrupt a hunt-breakfast in a clearing, forcing the hunters to hide behind trees, scattering plates and food in all directions.

What can I do, dearest, but wait for you to calm down again. Has your father gone away again? It seems to me that you could have discussed any kind of incident with him; his sympathetic interest may not be as great as your mother's, but this should make it all the easier to get advice, or, failing that, gain reassurance from him. But of course he must be at home, since you say you have to lie to your parents. Might another journey to Dresden be necessary, one that I could manage as well as you, and that I would undertake with pleasure, since I assume it would be more difficult for you to leave home a second time? But I may be stirring up your grief with these questions more than I am assuaging it. But there is nothing else I can do; I have gradually lost sight of all other human beings, can see only you, and you are so distressed.

Franz

From February 26 to 27, 1913

Are your worries really over now? It seems so, according to your morning letter, or is it only self-control for my sake? For a while I kept turning the telegram around in my hand, unopened. What could be in it? No matter how aware I am of your kindness, and no matter how much I exploit that kindness (my entire present-day existence has no other purpose or pastime)—it had never occurred to me that with your telegram you might wish to remove every possible anxiety. For a moment I thought it might say: “Hurry to the station. Am arriving in 15 minutes.” I admit a telegram of that kind would have given me a frightful shock. I would actually have felt (even experienced it for one moment) nothing but shock—like suddenly being torn out of a long night’s sleep. Well, it would probably have roused me out of my lethargy, this dreadful lethargy that turns the entire apartment, in fact, the entire city, into one big bed for me. But the telegram contained nothing of the kind; I am alone as before, except that sometimes I can virtually see my face staring back at me from the paper I am writing on, so that I almost feel like laying down my pen to prevent myself from clinging to you continually, from bending you down, you who stand straight, and instead abandoning myself to the current I seem to feel moving slowly beneath me.

My second thought about the telegram, however, was precisely the opposite: “Then I probably won’t get a letter tomorrow,” and I still haven’t quite recovered from this fright.

Dearest, haven’t you slightly misunderstood what I said about your sister? On the contrary, she actually strikes me as full of character, but her love for the child is somewhat monotonous, and makes one suspect she may not be very good at bringing it up. Nor could I make out why in this letter—which followed the previous one after a long interval—the husband, your brother-in-law, wasn’t mentioned at all.

Today's letter, dearest, was the second to be broken off. Don't forget the next installments! The first broke off at an incident that was evidently surprising, and greatly influenced your drawing when you were in 3rd grade; and this letter breaks off in Silesia, when your father was doing your sister's homework.

I should also like to have your opinion and explanation, dearest, of the *pleasure* I derived from that bookseller's son. With every answer to any question of this kind I feel myself entering more deeply into you, obtain a further sanction to live in you, and for a moment exchange a life of pretense for one of burning reality.

Franz

February 27 to 28, 1913

I was put to shame this evening. I went for a walk with Weltsch (his book [*Intuition and Concept*] has already appeared. Would you be interested in it? I don't think so: it is strictly philosophical. I have to force myself to read and understand it; my attention strays too easily when there is nothing there to put one's finger on)—well, I went for a walk with him and imperceptibly he began—it didn't last long and was probably only a momentary mood—talking about and against my gloom. What put me to shame was not that he actually made the attempt to rebuke me. Indeed, this is something I like hearing; it is pleasant to allow these things to go through one's empty head; moreover, what he said today was extremely wise. What put me to shame was rather that he thought this rebuke necessary, though I hadn't directly invited it with any single remark and though at this particular moment he is wholly preoccupied with his own affairs. But what shamed me most was that he tried—whether consciously or unconsciously is neither here nor there, for after all I am talking of my shame—not to let me see he was rebuking me; he spoke in general terms with a reasoning far too hasty, in my opinion, and counterreasoning far too brief, which he is so fond of and which comes to him so naturally.

What's the good of feeling ashamed! After I had seen him home (it was foggy, and this frightens him), I thought of going to the coffeehouse (I might have met Werfel and others there), but then I dreaded that too, and after some wavering I decided to go home. Then I met an acquaintance, a Zionist student who is very sensible, keen, active, amiable, but at the same time possesses a degree of composure I find altogether disturbing. He stops me, invites me to an especially important evening meeting (how many similar invitations has he not wasted on me in the course of the years!); at that moment my indifference to him as a person, or to any form of Zionism, was immense and inexpressible, but—and you must believe me, dearest—I could not find a socially possible way of saying goodbye, although a silent handshake would have been quite enough, and for this reason alone I offered to accompany him, and in fact accompanied him as far as the door of the very coffeehouse I had meant to go to earlier on. But I would not allow myself to be dragged inside; instead, surprisingly, nicely and easily, I found that liberating handshake.

It's late now, and I have told you practically nothing about this evening, though I would have had quite a lot to tell you about my being alone.

Franz

From [February] 28 to March 1 [1913]

Late, dearest, late. I did some work for the office and that made me late. And I feel cold as well. Have I caught a chill again? It's rather annoying; I feel a continuous cold draft down my left side.

Really, how can you say that I could be angry with you if for once I don't get a letter? Understand, and impress upon your mind the fact that I must be grateful to you for everything you give me, and that one kind word is worth more to me, as it is in the eyes of a higher judge, than the whole pile of my letters. So, with your life being such a rush, don't force yourself to write, let a day pass without writing if it could rob you even of a little of the sleep you so

badly need; and rest assured that I shall wait steadfastly for your next letter, however many days you may have missed. In this I am steadfast, no matter how much everything else around me may flutter and change.

This evening, and also during the day, I was calmer and more self-assured than usual; now it has all gone again. I must say I should like to meet the man who, without injury to himself, could stand my way of life, above all my lonely evening walks. At home I speak to hardly anyone; the relationship with my sister, based mainly on my writing, is also wearing very thin. Our lives, yours and mine, are now precise opposites; you are constantly surrounded by people, I rarely see a soul; the people at the office hardly count, least of all now that I have been sleeping better for several days and find my work less irksome. It is as irrelevant as I am; we suit each other. Very soon I shall even be made vice-secretary; it serves me right.[58]

The other day I was walking along Eisengasse when beside me someone said: “What is Karl doing?” I turn; I see a man who, without taking any notice of me, walks along talking to himself, and had also asked himself this question. But it so happens that the principal character in my ill-fated novel is called Karl, and it was this harmless passerby’s function to jeer at me, for I can hardly consider it an encouragement.

The other day in connection with my uncle’s letter you asked me about my plans and prospects. I was amazed by your question, and am now reminded of it again by this stranger’s question. Needless to say I have no plans, no prospects; I cannot step into the future; I can crash into the future, grind into the future, stumble into the future, this I can do; but best of all I can lie still. Plans and prospects, however—honestly, I have none; when things go well, I am entirely absorbed by the present; when things go badly, I curse even the present, let alone the future!

Franz

Saturday [March 1, 1913] 2 o’clock [A.M.]

Just a few words, dearest. A pleasant evening at Max's. I read myself into a frenzy with my story.[59] But then we did let ourselves go, and laughed a lot. If one bolts the doors and windows against the world, one can from time to time create the semblance and almost the beginning of the reality of a beautiful life. I started a little story[60] yesterday, it is still so little its head has hardly begun to show, as yet one cannot tell; all the more wicked that contrary to every good resolution I abandoned it today, and went to see Max. If it's worth anything it could perhaps wait until tomorrow.

March 2, 1913

Sunday afternoon. I am quite distracted. At Baum's, who has just returned from Berlin where he spent a few days on publishing business, I heard such an extraordinary assortment of news, and this in spite of having, very rudely, to silence Frau Baum, of whom I am very fond, and put her out of the room—since, still drunk with Oskar's success in Berlin, she kept on interrupting. On arriving there, I had a headache and am now sitting here with a headache. By the way, Oskar is reading in the Klindworthsaal on April 1st; shall I go with him to Berlin?

My headache started in the night. During the evening I was unable to control my agitation; it tore at me again and again, I could not get to sleep, just kept tossing and turning. My ordinary common sense told me to get up, make use of the night's silence, and write. Something prevented me from doing so.

The promised letter has not arrived, dearest. Don't promise, dearest, don't promise, if it's not going to arrive. I am satisfied with anything, one word that comes from your heart is enough for me, but don't promise something, dearest, that doesn't arrive.

I still haven't received your sister's[61] address, and it really is high time. The parcel may not get there in time; you will put the blame on me, lose confidence in me, and it gives me such pleasure to be asked to do that kind of job. I am proud of it. Remember to send me a little note to enclose as well, otherwise I won't know how to inform your sister that you are the donor, unless you were to notify

her direct.—I am writing briefly and in haste because I am in my ice-cold room. Farewell, dearest, and continue to stay by me.

Franz

From March 2 to 3, 1913

My sisters and their husbands have gone; it is already 10:30; but my father has sat down again and ordered my mother to play cards. Owing to my recent cold-catching tendencies, I am obliged to share the living room, and so am writing to the sounds of the card game. My mother is sitting opposite me, my father at the head of the table, on my right. Just now, as my father rose to put a bottle of water outside the balcony door, I whispered to my mother without taking my pen from the paper: “Do go to bed!” No doubt she would like to, but it is difficult.

“Double the last two!” exclaims my father, which means that at least two more games will have to be played, and this could take a very long time.

Earlier this evening I again went for a walk with my sister, and while talking of other things, in a moment of loneliness, which often comes over me, especially in company (something not uncommon to others, of course), this thought passed through my mind: do you, dearest (it is always dearest, for I have and shall have no one else), still care for me as much as you used to? It is not so much in your letters that I sense a change in your opinion of me; on the contrary, not in your letters at all.

(It is past 1 o’clock. In the meantime, dearest, I have been almost entirely thrown by my story [the “Liman” fragment]—today was the verdict, and it was found against me—and now, if you want me, I literally come crawling back to you.) I deduce this change in your opinion of me mainly from my own recent behavior, and tell myself that it is impossible for you to retain your former attitude. Lately I have been in the grip of something that is not exceptional, I have known it for 15 years; with the help of my writing I managed to get out of it for some time, and in my ignorance of how alarmingly

short-lived this “getting out of it” was, I had the courage to turn to you, and proud of my apparent rebirth I believed I could accept the entire responsibility for my attempt at drawing you, the most precious thing I had ever come across in my life, over to me. But in what light have I shown myself to you these past weeks? How can you, if you are in your right mind, continue to stay with me? I have no doubt that in ordinary circumstances you would have the courage to give your truthful opinion, even if no more than a glimmer of a change had taken place. But your candor, dearest, is no greater than your kindness. And what I fear is that even if I were to become abhorrent to you—after all, you are a girl, and want a man, not a flabby worm on the earth—even if I were to become abhorrent, your kindness would not fail you. You realize how completely I belong to you—but does one abruptly throw away a thing that belongs to one so completely, even if reasonable consideration for oneself demands it? And you of all people—would you do it? Could you overcome your compassion? You who are so deeply affected by the unhappiness of all those around you? On the other hand, there is me. I will not deny that I could very easily feed on someone else’s compassion, but I certainly could not enjoy the fruits of any kind of compassion that would inevitably destroy you. Remember that, dearest, remember that! I could endure anything more easily than that. Anything you say, prompted by whatever sentiment—more easily than that kind of compassion. Your compassion, intended for my good, would in its effect ultimately have to turn against me. You are far away, and I cannot see you—nevertheless I would know if you were destroying yourself with compassion. And for this reason, dearest, answer the following question today—when it certainly hasn’t quite reached that point—without evasions, and for my reassurance: Should you at any time realize, clearly enough to exclude at least most of the doubts, that I am, though perhaps with some difficulty, dispensable to you; should you realize that I am a hindrance to your ideas of the future (*why is it that I hear nothing about them?*); should you realize that you—a kind, active, lively, self-assured person—have nothing, save something harmful to yourself, in common with the confusion or

rather the monotonous blur of my personality, would you then, dearest (please don't answer this lightly, be aware of the responsibility of your reply!), would you, heedless of your compassion, be able to tell me so truthfully? I repeat: this is a question of kindness, not love of truth! And an answer limited to denying the possibility of the supposition contained in my question would not be an answer that could satisfy either me, or my anxiety about you. Or rather, it would be an adequate answer; that is to say, an admission of invincible compassion.—But why do I ask at all, and torment you! After all, I know the answer.

Dearest, goodnight. I will leave this letter and go to bed, not exactly from exhaustion, rather from indecision and hopelessness.

Franz

From March 3 to 4, 1913

Today, dearest, there was no letter from you. It is easily explained; yesterday your sister was in Berlin, there was no time, but I still haven't got the address in Budapest, and if it doesn't come tomorrow the birthday may be over.

I have a lot to tell you, for my entire existence is no more than something I would like, if possible, to commit to your care—and yet I have been sitting here quietly for some little time with my pen in the air; after all, yesterday's letter was a question that has to be answered, and since I had no news today, it seems to me, however absurd the idea, that the letter I wrote yesterday, which won't even reach you until tomorrow, has also remained unanswered. I have the feeling of being outside a locked door behind which you live, and which will never be opened. Knocking is the only way of communicating, and now all is silent behind the door. But there is one thing I can do (how nervous I am! There is very little ink in my inkpot, so it is propped up on a matchbox, and just now as I quickly dipped my pen, it slid off the box—I twitched from head to foot, and both my hands shot upward, as though I were begging for mercy), there is one thing I can do, which is to wait, though my

parenthetical nervousness alone appears to contradict this. For me impatience is only one way of passing the time while waiting; the strength required for waiting is not weakened by it, though of course it is not strength at all, but weakness, and the relaxing—at the slightest suggestion—of those feeble powers that had been active. This characteristic of mine, dearest, exposes you to the greatest dangers—this I add as a postscript to yesterday's letter. Because I for my part would never leave you, not even if it were my lot—worse things could happen to me—to have with you an inner relationship that corresponded to an outer circumstance such as having nothing to do but wait forever outside the side entrance to your house, while you passed in and out through the front door. When judging me, don't let this mislead you, and however low I may bend over your hand, speak your true mind over and above my head! Anyway, nothing you say will surprise me. I am now a different person to the one I was during the first 2 months of our correspondence; it is not a transformation into a new state, rather a relapse into an old and no doubt lasting one. If you felt drawn to that person, you must, you must inevitably abhor this one. If you conceal this fact, you do so out of compassion and from misleading recollections. The fact that this different person—so greatly altered in every way—continues to cling to you, if anything more tenaciously than before, cannot fail, if you will admit it to yourself, to make him even more abhorrent to you.

Franz

From March 4 to 5, 1913

You have had to put up with a great deal recently, dearest, and you put up with it in a way that is incomprehensible to me on the one hand, and that I unhesitatingly expect of you on the other. Whether you complain, are weary, or even cry in your letters, I can see you behind them, so vigorous and lively that shame about myself and sadness over the contrast—I here, you there—make me want to creep into a corner. The trouble is, I am not at peace with myself; I

am not always “something,” and if for once I am “something,” I pay for it by “being nothing” for months on end. And of course if I don’t collect myself in time, my judgment of people and of the world in general suffers from it, too; my view of the hopelessness of the world is due largely to this distorted judgment which could no doubt be straightened out automatically by reflecting, but only for a single useless moment. As illustration, let me take a random example: In the foyer of a cinematographic theater I visited this evening with Max, his wife, and Weltsch (which reminds me that it is now nearly 2 o’clock), there are a number of photographs from the film *The Other One.*[62] You must have read about it, Bassermann is in it, and it will be shown here next week. The sight of B. on a poster, alone and in an armchair, had the same stirring effect upon me as it had that time in Berlin,[63] and to their general disgust I kept dragging anyone I could get hold of—Max, his wife, or Weltsch—back to that poster. Faced by the photographs, my pleasure diminished at once, for one can see it is a wretched film; the situations featured were simply old-fashioned cinematic devices, and, after all, a snapshot of a horse in action is almost invariably beautiful, whereas a snapshot of a criminal expression on a human face, even Bassermann’s, could well be meaningless. Well, I said to myself, B. has lent himself, at any rate in this film, to something unworthy of him. Nevertheless, he has lived through the film, carried the excitements of the plot in his heart from beginning to end, and whatever a man of such caliber has experienced is unconditionally lovable. So far my judgment is still correct, although I am already a little ahead of myself. But not long ago, when waiting downstairs for the front door to be opened, gazing at the night and recalling those photographs, I found myself pitying B. as though he were the most unfortunate of men. This is how I imagine the situation: the satisfaction of acting is over; *the film is made; B. himself can no longer influence it in any way*; he need not even realize that he had allowed himself to be taken advantage of, and yet, when watching himself in the film, he may become aware of the utter futility of exerting all his considerable powers and—I am not exaggerating my sense of compassion—he grows older,

weak, gets pushed aside in his armchair, and vanishes somewhere into the mists of time. How wrong! This is just where the error of my judgment lies. Even after the completion of the film Bassermann goes home as Bassermann, and no one else. If at any time he should withdraw, he will withdraw completely, and be gone; he will not do as I do, and would like to impute to all others, which is to go on fluttering around myself like a bird kept from its nest by some curse, endlessly fluttering around this entirely deserted nest, never letting it out of its sight.

Goodnight, dearest. May I kiss you, may I put my arms around your body?

Franz

From March 5 to 6, 1913

Past 10 o'clock, dearest, and I am as weary as you were the day before yesterday. I've returned to my cold room, I was beginning (oh dear, now I can hear my father next door talking about the factory) to feel quite limp from the heat next door. I want you to know that as from today my way of life is going to be different for a while; if it has been intolerable up to now, perhaps it will be possible some other way; if one cannot sleep on one's left side, one turns (needless to say one may often regret it, in which case there is no end to the tossing and turning) to lie on one's right, and really the life I lead is just like being in bed. (Next door they are still talking about the factory, it makes me shudder; I do seem to have chosen the right moment to go.) The changes in my way of life consist in my——

I broke off at this point, the room next door had been vacated; I said goodnight to my parents and found my father standing on the sofa winding the clock, and went on into the living room, but as I couldn't make up my mind to continue my letter, I picked up Max and Felix's book [*Intuition and Concept*] and once again read the opening chapter, parts of which are brilliantly written, as though by a third, unknown, and very distinguished person. I had put the letter

aside because I suddenly became intensely aware that I never stop writing about anything but myself, perhaps even repeating the same things again and again, and that it is objectionable to keep laying myself bare before you without knowing whether it is not making you shake inside with horror, impatience, or boredom. In saying this, dearest, I do not doubt you in any way; surely lovers can talk to each other in this fashion; it even says so in the prologue you sent me today and which gave me a great deal of pleasure, though it is not complete and in places far too superficial. Besides, dearest, please understand me and don't be cross; I reproach myself with these things solely on account of my letters; if we were together and you were sitting on the chair beside me (I am just pulling it a little closer with my left hand), I would not so much as consider these possibilities, even if—as is highly probable—I had many worse things to say about myself than those I write. (How about this, Felice, as a tiny enticement for future meetings?) Yes, you, from whom an upsetting letter may be threatening tomorrow, should be sitting in this chair, the table should be pushed aside, and our hands should be joined—a vision that makes me forget all about my commission for Budapest. Needless to say it has been carried out.

Franz

From March 6 to 7, 1913

No, that is not enough for me. I asked if it wasn't above all compassion that you felt for me. And I justified my question. All you say is: No. But I really was a different person when I wrote that first letter, a carbon copy of which (it is the only letter I have a copy of) I found a few days ago during a perfunctory tidying up of my desk (which never gets tidied in any other way). I was different, this you cannot deny, and even if I had occasional lapses, I could easily find my way back. Have I been misleading you then, right up to these unhappy times? There are only two possibilities: either you feel nothing but compassion for me, in which case why do I insist upon your love, obstruct your every course, force you to write and think

of me every day, tyrannize you with a helpless man's helpless love? Why, instead, don't I try to find a way of gently helping you to free yourself from me, of quietly by myself savoring the knowledge of your compassion for me, and thus at least becoming worthy of that compassion? The second possibility is that compassion is not exclusively what you feel for me; rather that you have been misled during the past six months; you lack true insight into my wretched personality, disregard my confessions, and unconsciously prevent yourself from believing in them, although this would be very much against your nature. In that case, why don't I do everything in my power to make the situation perfectly clear to you? Why don't I choose the plainest, shortest words that can be neither disregarded, misunderstood, nor forgotten? Could it be that I still have some hope, or am toying with the hope, of being able to keep you? If this be so, as it sometimes seems to be, then it would be my duty to step out of myself and quite ruthlessly defend you against myself.

However, there is yet a third possibility: compassion may not be exclusively what you feel for me, and you may even have a perfect understanding of my present state, but may think that at some time I might yet turn into a useful human being with whom a steady, calm, lively relationship would be possible. If this is what you think, you are under a terrible misapprehension; as I have told you before, my present state (and today it is comparative paradise) is not an exceptional state. Don't succumb, Felice, to these misapprehensions! Not for 2 days could you live beside me. I received a letter today from an 18-year-old schoolboy whom I have met 2 or 3 times at Baum's. At the end of the letter he calls himself my "very obedient disciple." I feel sick at the thought of it. What a preposterous notion! I can never tear myself open wide enough to people to reveal everything and so frighten them away. To which of course I must add that even if I were a hero, I should want to frighten the schoolboy away, because I don't like him (probably on account of his youth), whereas I should want to drag you, dearest, eternally dearest, down to the dreadful decrepitude that I represent.

Franz

From March 7 to 8, 1913

I have taken my weariness with me, dearest, to the cabaret where I am now sitting writing to you during the intermission. The music distracts me, smoke comes fuming into my face, a female dancer (Oh, my God, how well I understand dancing!) who took the part of a sailor (what vitality and stamping of feet and flexing of the body, with head slightly lowered, as she began her turn once again) is standing about in the foyer asking to be looked at—nevertheless I am happy to be clinging to this, your paper and thus—strange as it may seem to be writing letters in this place—*precisely by doing so*—no one knows it—being a man among men.

My question about coming to Berlin on the 1st was indeed a kind of joke, even if not meant to be particularly funny—but the stamps of the advertising exhibition, were they even as much as a question?

A letter such as yours of today, dearest, is only too well designed to make me careless in my efforts to explain myself to you, and in trying to convince you of the impossibility of any kind of human relationship with me. And even if today—every day lost to this purpose seems like a reproach—under the influence of your letter, which I read again hurriedly before leaving home, and am carrying in my inside pocket—the bell! The lights are going down.

So very late. And yet I left long before the end, not only on account of my eternal exhaustion, all day my head has been waiting frantically for me to close my eyes, but also because it always does me good to escape from any circumscribed group before its general dissolution. Can you understand that?

And now, dearest, take me as I am, but don't forget, don't forget to throw me out at the right moment!

Franz

March 9, 1913

Sunday, before lunch.

Dear Felice, why do your letters make me weak and arrest my pen, which wants to keep on endlessly writing the truth about myself,

the sad revelations?

I was different in the beginning, this you admit, but it would not really matter; the point is that what has led me from there to here is not a straight line of human development; on the contrary, I am completely thrown back onto my old tracks, but between the old and the new there is no communication, neither straight nor zigzag, there is only a sad, empty, phantom road. (It is now after lunch. Little Felix has just been conveyed in the governess' arms through my room into the bedroom; behind him comes my father, behind him my brother-in-law, behind him my sister. He has just been put down in my mother's bed, and now my father, from my room, is listening at the bedroom door in the hope that Felix will call him again, for he is the one Felix loves best of all. There, he has just called out "Dje-Dje," meaning Grandfather, and now my father, trembling with joy, opens the door several times, quickly pops his head through the door several times, and so entices the child to further Dje-Dje-calls.)

But the things about you that have changed, Felice, were only minor details on the very edge of your existence which, in the course of these months, has unfolded under my eyes, unfolded from a divine, unchanging core.

Of my complaints you say, "I don't believe them, and you don't believe them, either." The misfortune lies in this very notion, and I myself am not free of blame. I cannot deny that I have acquired great experience in complaining (alas, with perfect justification), so that the plaintive note is, as to the beggars in the streets, constantly at my command, even when I don't feel quite like it at heart. But I recognize the duty to convince you, which hangs over me every moment of the day, and for this reason complain automatically, without thinking, and needless to say thereby achieve the opposite. "You don't believe them," and then you transfer your disbelief to the genuine complaints as well.

But enough of that! An end to it all, at least for what remains of this letter. For various reasons I felt particularly alone yesterday evening, which is actually the best of all feelings; nobody bothers one (even if one happens to be walking with a great number of

relatives); one is surrounded by a void, everything is meticulously prepared for your coming. And then you did come, were quite close to me, however lonely, almost grotesquely lonely I may have been looking.

Franz

From March 9 to 10, 1913

Really, how unreasonable and slack is the life I lead! I don't even want to talk about it. I have spent this Sunday hanging my head without being unhappy, sitting around without being unduly bored, going for a walk with Felix, and then (almost with a sigh of relief) alone, and yet, whatever I did, there was always that sensation of a fist in my neck.

"The feeling that you might be taken from me"—how could I not have it, dearest, since I deny myself the right (but "right" is not strong enough, "deny" is not strong enough!), since I deny myself the right to keep you? Don't deceive yourself, dearest; the cause of the trouble lies not in the distance; on the contrary, it is this very distance that gives me at least the semblance of having some right to you, and I am holding on to that, insofar as one can hold on to uncertainties with uncertain hands.

By the way, last night I discovered something that should have been terrible, but in fact came almost as a relief. I got home late from Baum's, I did not feel like writing to you then, though there is so little variation within my moods that it makes no sense to preserve any single one for my letters to you, and so I might well have written and enjoyed the benefit, but I did not write; nor did I feel like going to bed; I still felt too great an uneasiness within myself after taking an admittedly only very short walk with my relatives whom, after a premature parting from Max, his wife, and Felix, I had gone to meet at the coffeehouse—and so, because the notebooks containing my novel happened to be lying there (by some chance these books, long unused, had risen to the surface), I looked at these books and read them at first with unconcerned confidence,

as though I knew from memory the exact sequence of what was good, fairly good, and bad, but grew more and more amazed, and finally came to the irrefutable conclusion that of the entire book only the first chapter stems from an inner truth, while all the rest, with the exception, of course, of some isolated short and even longer passages, was written as it were from recollections of deep but totally absent feelings, and consequently has to be rejected—i.e., out of some 400 large pages only 56 (I think) remain. If the 200-odd pages of an utterly useless version of the story, written in the winter and spring of last year, are added to the 350 pages, then for this story I wrote a total of 550 worthless pages. But now goodnight, my poor dearest, dream of pleasanter things than of your

Franz

From March 10 to 11, 1912 [1913]

What is it that I have done to deserve the box with these nice flowers?§ I am not aware of having done anything to deserve them, and it would have been far more appropriate if a demon had been hidden in the box, had taken a nip at my nose, and had refused to let go, so that I should have to carry him around with me forever. Do you know that I never had any real feeling for flowers, and even now can only appreciate flowers provided they come from you, and even then I appreciate them only indirectly through your love of them. Ever since my childhood there have been times when I was almost unhappy about my inability to appreciate flowers. This inability is associated to some extent with my inability to appreciate music, at least I have often sensed a connection. I am hardly able to see the beauty of flowers; one rose is to me a thing of indifference, two become too much alike, an arrangement of flowers always seems to me both haphazard and ineffective. And, as is the way with deficiencies, I have often tried to pretend to others that I had a special liking for flowers. As with all conscious deficiencies, I succeeded in deceiving those people who had but a vague liking for flowers, not otherwise apparent in any aspect of their character. For

example, my mother certainly thinks I am a lover of flowers, because I like giving them to people and because flowers on wire almost make me shudder. But the wire does not really worry me on the flowers' account; I am thinking only of myself, and that piece of metal twining itself into a living thing is abhorrent to me for this very reason. I might not have become so much aware of being a stranger among flowers, if toward the end of my schooldays and during my time at the university I hadn't had a great friend (his first name was Ewald [Přibram], almost a flower-name, don't you think?) who, without being especially sensitive to delicate impressions, even without having any feeling for music, had such a passion for flowers that if, for example, he happened to be looking at flowers, cutting them (he had a beautiful garden), watering them, arranging them in a vase, carrying them, or giving them to me (what am I going to do with them? I often used to ask myself, and yet did not like to say so explicitly, although in general terms I said so often enough, for after all he was not to be deceived), he was literally transformed by his love, so much so that his whole voice changed—I could almost say acquired a ringing tone, despite the slight impediment in his speech. We would often stand by the flower beds, he gazing at the flowers, while I, in my boredom, gazed beyond them. I wonder what he would say now if he could see me lifting the flowers carefully out of their box, pressing them to my face, and gazing at them for a long time! How can I thank you for all your love and kindness, Felice?

Franz,

written close underneath.

From March 11 to 12 [1913]

It is sad, Felice; you are worried, and I have to listen to your worries like someone who is not only blind and dumb, but also unable to use his limbs, whose hearing is all that's left to him. For me, the worst of it is that I am doing, or at least have done you an injustice, for since you stopped writing on this subject, once even ignored my

allusion to it, I imagined that your journey and your sister's journey had either cleared up the trouble, or at least brought it to a point where no deterioration or further upsets would occur. This is what I thought when I wrote my most recent letters and, quite harmlessly, expected you to take an interest in my affairs, whereas all the time —admittedly without so much as a hint—you were still struggling with your old worries. I really do not wish to be told, dearest; after all, it is not your secret, it's your sister's; but I always want to know when you are "at the end of your tether," so that to my innate brutality in my treatment of a being such as you, I do not add the brutality due to my ignorance of the situation. Would you lend me a picture of your sister for 2 days, so that I know who it is you are worrying about? Are you the only person aware of her misfortune? Does Toni, for instance, know nothing?

How sad it is! And how helpless I am! Surely the best thing would be to come to Berlin, take you in my arms, and carry you back here. But if I were capable of that, I would have done it long ago. I have been thinking for some time: May I call you "Fe"? This was how you sometimes used to sign your letters; it also reminds one of "Fee" [fairy], and of the beautiful land of China, and finally it is a most suitable syllable to whisper in your ear. Well? Fe? Agree only if you like it; you are dear to me by whatever name.

What a strange confession in today's letter! You consider yourself a weak girl who even in peaceful moments doesn't know what to do with herself! Listen, surely you are not trying to disguise yourself, and frighten me with myself? I should like to know what led you to make the remark and how its conception can be traced back beyond Saturday night. "Not to know what to do with oneself"—you should be spared that, at least in the long run; trust me, I have experience in these matters; such people neither look like you, nor do they have your eyes. Your present state can only be due to the fact that you find other people's sufferings harder to bear than your own, and thus by outward causes are thrown into a state of confusion such as you would never encounter from within.

Franz

From March 12 to 13, 1913

Only a few words, my dearest, it is better that way. It's already so late. I was at Max's, and then at the coffeehouse. I filled myself up with all kinds of reading, I was alone. Perhaps I should have gone home earlier after all; when entering the coffeehouse I drew back for an instant, but went in nevertheless; it was too late to get home in time for supper, and by then my thirst for magazines had grown too strong. As I took hold of the chair, ready to sit down, I still wondered if I ought to stay. And now it is very late, and I am touching you with the tips of my fingers only. A very good night!

Franz

From March 13 to 14, 1913

Is one any calmer? Is sorrow receding? One might think so, judging by today's letter, and I wish it were so, but I lack confidence. You find you can't read? No wonder. When would you have the time? But how did you, Felice dearest, how did you come across *Uriel Acosta*?[64] I don't know the play either, nor do I think I could read it, though what you jokingly say about your brain is actually true of mine. But it may be that a brain has to dry up and harden, so that when the time comes one can strike a spark from it.—This is what I was about to write when, as I was sitting alone in the living room, my sister rang the bell; she had returned home from the cinematographic theater and I had to let her in. I had been interrupted, so abandoned the letter. My sister talked about the performance, or rather I questioned her about it, for although I myself rarely go to the cinematographic theater, I usually know by heart almost all the weekly programs in every one of them. My need for pleasure and distraction feeds on posters; when looking at posters I derive some relief from my habitual inner uneasiness, that everlasting feeling of impermanence; whenever I returned to the city after the summer vacation, which invariably turned out to have been unsatisfactory, I felt a great thirst for posters, and, from the tram on my way home, swiftly and with some effort I used to read

fragmentary snatches of the posters we were passing.—Sometimes, and I don't know why, everything I want to say to you presses upon me with great intensity, like a crowd of people all trying to squeeze through a narrow door at once. And I have said nothing to you, less than nothing, for everything I have written recently has been false—not fundamentally, of course, because fundamentally everything is true—but with so much confusion and falseness on the surface that no one could be expected to see through it. Can you, dearest? No, certainly not. But let us leave it for now, it is very late. I was delayed by my sister, who had seen *La Broyeuse des Cœœurs*, the Heartbreaker. And then I spent far too long reading a scientific book. How would it be, dearest, if instead of letters I were to send you pages of my diary? No matter how little happens, how pointless it may be, how great my indifference to it all. I miss not keeping a diary.[65] But unless you were to read it, it wouldn't be a diary to me. And the changes and omissions necessary in a diary meant for you would surely be all the more beneficial and instructive for me. Do you agree? The difference as compared to my letters will be that the pages of my diary may sometimes contain more substance, but will certainly be even more boring and even more brutal than my letters. But don't be too alarmed; my love for you will not be absent from them. What ought you to read? But I don't know what you have read. And I still haven't received that much-requested booklist. Offhand I would say read *The Sorrows of Werther*.[66] Just recently, strangely enough, I have often thought about your father and kept meaning to ask if he had finished reading *At Sunrise*. Listen, Felice, you don't think about me enough; yesterday I learned that the *Berliner Tageblatt* recently had a review by Stoessl of *Intensity of Feeling*. And you didn't send it to me. I am enclosing two newspaper clippings that appeared today and happen to be close at hand. The short story, in fact, is as uncharacteristic of Oskar as the essay is of Felix; they can both do very much better work; one of these days you are sure to be amazed by Oskar's better work, while that of Felix will leave you cold. (And me no less so.)[67]

With all your suffering on Sunday you did the cooking as well, and such appetizing things! This morning I had to regret that my

principles would not allow me to eat anything: your account had given me such an appetite. Of course it's only a theoretical appetite, since I always enjoy watching people eat.

Adieu, Felice, and my very special thanks for today's long letter.

Franz

From March 14 to 15, 1912 [1913]

It started with an inkblot, I didn't change the paper, perhaps this may even bring a little reality to my writing, which (haven't you noticed it, dearest?) is becoming increasingly unreal, conjured up out of the air.—Otherwise only a few words; it's late again; I went to the cinematograph with Felix to see *The Other One*, and then for a walk. To avoid a repetition tomorrow of a morning such as I had today, I won't write any more now. You know, dearest, with his absolute stability my chief at the office gives me strength; I am unable to follow his example, but I can imitate him consciously up to a point, beyond that point unconsciously, and furthermore I am able at least to observe him, and so have something to go by; today he was ill. When he is not at the office I have to undertake at his desk, both in the morning and at noon, the distribution of the entire mail. Well, I lay in that armchair in a state of dissolution; people came, I neither saw nor heard them; I examined uninteresting letters with a fixed stare; I kept thinking I ought to be at home and in bed, but—just imagine—I didn't expect even my bed, even a quiet rest to bring about any improvement. Well, to some extent this is not difficult to explain: I sleep little, fitfully, and badly; I don't take much exercise, am utterly dissatisfied with myself, all of which made me collapse quite helplessly into the armchair. That there was no letter from you today I could hardly believe; I was far too feeble for it to make me either unhappy or uneasy (and I repeat once again, dearest, it is of no importance whatever if for once you haven't time to write); it was just that I couldn't quite understand it, and though I haven't given it much thought, it was surely another reason for all this pointless sitting around. And there was hardly any

change for the better during the entire morning. I walked home like a sick man, with the idea of the distance still to be covered constantly before me. But I am not ill; in fact, I don't look any different, except that I have one line above my nose, and an ever-increasing, by now fairly noticeable quantity of gray hair.

After having slept a little this evening, and somewhat cheered up by Bassermann, I even felt quite well at moments, and we—Felix and I—got along very nicely today. I could tell you a great deal about Bassermann, however wretched the play, and however much Bassermann is abused and abuses himself.—Goodnight, dearest, and a pleasant Sunday. I place my compliments to your Papa in your eyes.

Franz

March 16, 1913

Sunday, and no news. Now that is really very sad. Perhaps, my dearest, you want to write or can write only every other day, indeed it may well be better—I keep thinking anything is better than the present arrangement—but then let us agree upon it. I shall continue to write every day.

Dearest, dearest Felice! How I literally implored you last night! If only I deserved you (this you cannot judge) as much as I need you (this, at times, you undoubtedly suspect)! But deserving and needing are like dreaming and waking: the connection between them is blurred.

Again I don't like Fe as much as Felice; it's too short; it doesn't give one's breath time to linger. If only I could once, Felice—for once would be always—be so close to you that talking and listening would be one: silence.—They are quarreling in the kitchen about a stolen sausage, and distracting me. It is not only they who distract me, inside I am exulting with forces that are distracting.

But dearest, why do you allow yourself to be so much influenced by me that an automobile accident appears to you to be the best solution to one's troubles? That is certainly not you, dearest! I really

must have been sitting beside you in that automobile. While you live with these possible dangers, I grapple with shadows; if I were not one myself, it would be incomprehensible. Personally I can think of nothing better—and when reading such news, my desire becomes immense—than to stop with my own body any automobile in which you might be in danger. It would be the closest contact of which I am worthy and, I hope, capable.

Your sister [Erna] bears no more than a faint resemblance to you, but even if there were none, and I knew only that she is your sister, I should have to love her. The expression in her eyes, and the way they are set in relation to her nose, belong to a type of Jewish girl that I have always felt close to. Then there is a special gentleness around the mouth. And yet on the whole she is very strong, it seems, and not easily crushed by misfortune. And then she also has a girl friend who looks after her and comes to Berlin on her account? Her coiffure is rather unnecessarily large, but the picture may date from a time when one could not get along without curls.

What will you be doing, dearest, for Easter? Are you staying in Berlin? And if you do stay in Berlin, will many demands be made upon you? Why is it that your father is now spending so much time in Berlin?. Your sister [Erna] is probably also coming home for Easter? Still no news from Budapest? Could my grocer have forgotten that parcel? Baum will definitely be reading on April 14th. You will probably have left Berlin by then. A pity, a great pity!

Franz

From March 16 to 17, 1913

A point-blank question, Felice: At Easter, that is, Sunday or Monday, would you have any one hour to spare for me, and if so, would you consider it a good thing if I came? I repeat: it could be any one hour; I would do nothing in Berlin but wait for it (I know few people in Berlin, and don’t wish to see even those few, especially since they would expect me to meet a lot of literary people, and my own worries are too mixed up for me to stand that), and if it

couldn’t be one whole hour, then 4 quarters of an hour would do just as well; I wouldn’t miss a single one, I wouldn’t move from the vicinity of the telephone. So the most important question is whether you consider it a good thing, and whether you are aware of the kind of visitor to expect. But I do not want to see your relatives, dearest; I am not fit for that at present, and shall be even less so in Berlin; and when I say this I am not in the least considering that I have hardly a suit of clothes left in which to appear before you, even you. Not that this is of any importance, but one is so tempted to avoid the important issues—which in any case you will see and hear—and take refuge in unimportant ones. So think it over carefully, Felice. You may not have the time, in which case no thought is required; everyone is bound to be home for Easter—your father, your brother, your sister from Dresden; your approaching move will keep you busy; you will have to make arrangements for your trip to Frankfurt. In short, I shall understand perfectly if you don’t have the time; I am not saying this simply on account of my own indecision, for I would then make an effort to come to Frankfurt in April, should you be in favor of it.—So answer me soon.

Franz

March 17, 1913

Just a few words, dearest. First, my special thanks for your letter; it arrived just in time to bring a person, who was heart and soul in Berlin, a little nearer to his senses again. But secondly, something unpleasant, but very typical of me. I don’t know if I shall be able to come. It is still uncertain today, tomorrow it may be definite. I don’t want to discuss the reason until it has been decided. By Wednesday at 10 o’clock you should know for certain. But it is definitely nothing serious; we shall see. But go on loving me despite this dithering.

Franz

You are right, Felice; recently I have sometimes had to force myself to write to you; but writing to you and living have drawn very near to each other, and I also have to force myself to live. Shouldn't I?

Moreover, hardly a word comes to me from the fundamental source, but is seized upon fortuitously and with great difficulty somewhere along the way. When I was in the swing of writing and living, I once wrote to you that no true feeling need search for corresponding words, but is confronted or even impelled by them. Perhaps this is not quite true, after all.[68]

But how could my writing to you, however firm my hand, achieve everything I want to achieve: To convince you that my two requests are equally serious: "Go on loving me" and "Hate me!"

But that you don't think about me enough, this I do mean seriously. For if you did, you would have sent me that gray hair.— My hair is not only gray at the temples; no, my whole head is going gray, and at the thought of you not being able to stand someone simply because he was bald, it's going a little grayer.

In the photograph your sister in Budapest looks somewhat tired and sad, don't you think? Was she married then? She strikes me as more like your sister in Dresden than like you.

I haven't the heart to write the diary after all, Felice. (Again my pen won't let me write "Fe"; it's all right for highschool girls, for casual contacts; Felice means more, it is almost like a proper embrace, and I who depend on words, in this particular case as well as by my nature, cannot afford to miss such an opportunity.) Inevitably it would be full of unbearable things, quite impossible things, and would you really be capable, dearest, of reading the pages simply as a diary, and not as a letter? I would have to have this assurance in advance.

This afternoon I wrote as though the trip to Berlin depended entirely on me; that was due solely to the haste in which I wrote the letter; needless to say, the trip depends above all on the view you take of it.

Farewell, dearest, I'll write tomorrow during the day about the obstacle to my journey.

Franz

Have you read the things by Felix and Oskar?[69] I don't know "Monte Carlo";[70] Max doesn't want me to see it, because the editors have made too many changes. There will be something by Max about the Austrian Family[71] in the Easter issue.

March 18, 1913

*Strictly speaking* the obstacle to my journey still exists and I'm afraid will continue to exist; but it has lost its significance as an *obstacle*; so, as far as that goes, I could come. I just wanted to tell you this in haste, dearest. No letter! (Don't mistake this for an entreaty, it's only a sigh.)

Franz

March 19, 1913

I don't know, dearest, I have a mass of work to do, my desk is piled high, yet I can't do anything. Just as well I didn't make the decision to go to Berlin any sooner. My breath failed when I read your letter, and for some time after. True, it is only my weakness exploiting every possible opportunity to spread itself throughout my entire being, but this opportunity is really too great. How am I going to spend the few remaining days! Even last night—and by then I hadn't even had your reply—I could not write, but I cannot talk either, nor even listen, except to topics concerning Easter.

And yet there would be a perfect way of stifling all joy and expectation; I would only have to make clear to myself why I am going. I believe I have not made a secret of it, either to you, or to myself; it is just that I am unable to think it out to its conclusion, well aware of it as I am. And this very inability is actually my saving. I am going to Berlin for no other reason than to tell and

show you—you who have been misled by my letters—who I really am. Shall I be able to make it clearer in person than I could in writing? In writing I failed, because I thwarted my purpose, consciously and unconsciously; but when I am actually there, little can be concealed, even if I made an effort to do so. Presence is irrefutable.

Where can I meet you then on Sunday morning? However, should I still be prevented from coming, I would send a telegram on Saturday at the latest. Are you at the office all day Saturday?

I started this letter so happily, then the inevitable second paragraph queered my pitch and brought me to my senses.

Franz

Do you know the correspondence between Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning?[72]

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

March 20, 1913

No letter, and such longing for you, and in addition to the old threats, newly emerging further threats of possible obstacles to my short journey. Now at Easter there are usually—I hadn't thought of it before—meetings of all kinds of societies to discuss accident insurance, where representatives of the Institute speak on some subject or other, or have at least to be present at the debates. And in fact today two such invitations arrived. The Federation of Czech Milling Associations holds its convention in Prague on Monday, and the Czech builders from the Sudetenland have theirs in Brünn on Tuesday. Luckily, the meetings are in Czech, and my Czech is at best deplorable, but very serious suggestions have been made to me, and in accordance with the distribution of work within the Institute, it would undoubtedly be my concern; and during the holidays there is no great choice among those who could be sent to these meetings. But I must, I simply must see you, as much for your sake as for mine (though in each case for different reasons). How I needed you last

night! Every stair was an effort, because climbing them had no connection with my trip to Berlin.

Franz

March 21, 1913

You haven't written to me? There was nothing at the office (this is an ordinary working day[73] here, that's why I am also sending my letter to your office), and nothing at home, either. Felice! And besides it's not yet at all certain that I'll come; it won't be decided until tomorrow morning, the Millers' convention is still threatening. And if there is no letter tomorrow I won't know where to meet you. If I come, I shall most probably stay at the Askanische Hof, Königgrätzerstrasse. I heard yesterday that Pick is going to Berlin at the same time. It won't affect the purpose of my journey; it will be pleasant to travel with Pick, and once in Berlin he is not to bother me, although and because he knows, and is going to see, half the Berlin literary world. But when shall I see you—you, Felice, and where? Will it be possible on Sunday morning? But before appearing before you I must have a proper sleep. How little sleep I have had again this week! Much of my neurasthenia and much of my gray hair are due to too little sleep. If only I have had enough sleep when I meet you! So long as my knees don't shake! Supposing I were to appear in the state I am in at present!—But it is extremely silly to soliloquize like this and rob oneself of the little composure one might be able to muster. Well, Felice, for the time being the letter writers take leave of each other, and the two who saw each other 6 months ago will be seeing each other again. Put up with the actual man as you have with the letter writer, no more! (This is the advice of one who loves you very much.)

Franz

Whether I am in Berlin or not, you will get a letter from me on Sunday, or rather your mother will get it.—Now that I have

written this, it seems like an ugly fraud, but the presentation of the real man is about to begin.

[LETTER. POSTMARK: Prague, March 22, 1913]

Still undecided.

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Hotel Askanische Hof, Berlin]

[March 23, 1913]

But what has happened, Felice? You must surely have received my express letter on Friday in which I announced my arrival on Saturday night. Surely this particular letter can't have gone astray. And now I am in Berlin, and will have to leave again this afternoon at 4 or 5; the hours are passing, and no word from you. Please send your answer with the boy.[74] Or if you can manage it unobtrusively, you could telephone to make sure; I am sitting at the Askanische Hof—waiting.

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD, POSTMARK: Leipzig, March 25, 1913]

In Leipzig prior to departure. Best wishes.

Franz

[FOLLOWED BY THE SIGNATURES OF FRANZ WERFEL, YITZHAK LÖWY, OTTO PICK, AND FRANTIŠEK KHOL[75]]

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Dresden, March 25, 1913]

At the railway station in Dresden. Best wishes, from where don't I send them?

F.

March 26, 1913

Dearest, many, many thanks, I really am in need of comfort, the kind that springs from that dear, superhumanly kind heart of yours. I am writing no more than these few words today; I am almost beside myself with sleepiness, exhaustion, and anxiety, and still have a great stack of files to go through for tomorrow's proceedings in Aussig. And sleep, I simply have to sleep, I have to get up at 4:30 tomorrow morning. And if I still haven't started my confession—which needs courage, hence peace—by tomorrow, I shall certainly start it the day after.

Do you know that now, since my return, you seem even more incomprehensibly miraculous than ever?

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Aussig, March 27, 1913]

To start the day in Aussig with something worth while, and to secure a guardian for my work: Good morning, kindest regards, and thanks, nothing but thanks.

F.

[PICTURE POSTCARD]

March 27, 1913

All successfully concluded, but one is tired, and there is twitching in the head. Have just been reading a few words spoken in delirium by Goethe around 10 o'clock on the day of his death (he died at 11:30 A.M. on March 22, 1832), and can't get them out of my mind: "Do you see the beautiful female head with curls magnificently colored?"[76]

[ON THE UPPER HALF OF THE PICTURE] From sleepiness and too much concentration I have been looking at this postcard for a long time

before sending it off to Berlin, now only 6 hours distant, as opposed to the usual 8.

F.

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

March 28, 1913

Dearest Felice, please don't be angry with me for writing so little; it doesn't mean I have not much time for you; on the contrary, since I left Berlin there have been few moments when I have not been entirely, and fundamentally and all-comprisingly, yours. It is just that I was in Aussig yesterday, got home late, and then, from sheer exhaustion, sat literally like a puppet at the table. I have experienced terrible states of exhaustion. What I bore on my body was no longer a human head. The night of Wednesday to Thursday, i.e., before my trip to Aussig, I did not get to bed until 11:30, as I had to study the files, but could not get to sleep despite my great weariness; I still heard 1 o'clock strike, and yet had to be up again by 4:30. The window was open, and in the whirl of my thoughts I jumped out of the window continuously for whole quarter-hours, then trains came, one after another they ran over my body, outstretched on the tracks, deepening and widening the two cuts in my neck and legs. But why am I writing all this? Simply to draw you toward me once again by means of compassion, and savor once more its joys, before the real confession destroys it all.

How close I came to you by my visit to Berlin! I breathe only through you. But you do not know me well enough, you dearest and best one, though it is incomprehensible to me how you could have closed your eyes to the things that were happening right next to you. Only out of kindness? And if that's possible, can't everything be possible? But I shall write in greater detail about all this.

Franz

There was no letter today, it may be at home. My impatience to know is one of the reasons for stopping.

Could you tell me, Felice, how the impressions made upon you, first by my letter[s], and then by my presence, compare?

March 28, 1913

I won't complain any more, the 7 weeks—or will it only be 6, there is no calendar at hand—are both too short and too long; too short to say it all, too short to relish to the full my belief that your attitude toward me is not changing (as you say, you don't want to give me a direct answer to the confessions I have to make), but at the same time they are almost too long to be lived through. I look for you everywhere; small gestures made by all kinds of people in the street remind me of you, by their similarity as much as by their differences, but I cannot say what is obsessing me; it obsesses me utterly and leaves no strength to express it.

I gazed at you too long in real life (for this purpose at least, I made good use of my time) for your photographs to be of any use to me now. I don't want to look at them. In the photographs you are smooth, and nearer to the commonplace, whereas I have beheld the true, human, inevitably imperfect face, and lost myself in it. How can I find my way out of it again, and be content with mere photographs!

It is only for the nonarrival of news that I've kept my old sensitivity. I lack all confidence. I have it only when I write well, otherwise the world goes its inexorable way against me. I always consider every possible reason for the nonarrival of your letters, and I think it over a hundred times, much as one searches desperately the same place a hundred times over when looking for some object. Could it not be that something serious has actually happened to you, and that thus in actual fact something terrible has befallen me while I am dragging myself aimlessly around?—I turn these thoughts over in my mind all day long, slowly but incessantly.

If, as from tomorrow, dearest, I send diarylike reports, don't look upon them as a farce. They will include things I really could not

formulate in any other way if I were saying them to myself alone, though be it in your dear and peaceful presence. Naturally, I cannot forget about you when I am writing to you, since I cannot forget about you at any other time, either; but in a way I don't want to rouse myself out of my fuddled state—the only state that would permit me to write about these things—by invoking your name. Please, Felice, bear with patience everything you are going to hear; just now I cannot write; I shall have to say everything quite brutally; a few days ago you said you would take the responsibility for everything; and that would be a great deal more than listening patiently. I shall try to put down everything except that which would shame even me to write.—And now, dearest, farewell, may God keep you! Now that I have a vague idea of Berlin, please refer by name to all alleys‖ and places where you've been.

Yours

March 30, 1913

I still haven't started, I am too apprehensive, I love you too much. You say I had become indispensable to you? Pray God that this is true, my whole being cries out, and am I to smother that cry with my own hand?

Today my entire sleep was permeated in every possible way by the thought that I won't be getting a letter today. Nor did. I, and I could feel it in my throat before I understood the maid's words. I should exempt you from writing letters? Dearest, that would not be much. But to free you of me, now that would not be a bad achievement. But then I simply cannot do without your letters. I am obsessed by the need for news of you. It is only through your letters that I become capable of even the most insignificant daily task. I need your letter to move my little finger properly.

And how could I possibly do without news when I hear that you are not well, that you are still coughing, that you feel all in. If only things could be as they were in the days when everything inside me felt relaxed and I was able to write properly! In those days, when

writing letters, I felt closer to you than at other times; today, if it were possible, I would never leave my desk at all, for fear of losing a single moment of this being together. Sometimes, in desperation, if there's no alternative, I manage to console myself with these unfounded hopes. At the office, for example, when I have received no letter even by the second mail, and am at a loss to know what to do, and lack the powers of decision for even the simplest of dictations, and the entire field of accident insurance, however tenuously it may have been fixed in my head, has now left me completely, and any little temporary clerk knows more and is better fitted for the job than I, then I sometimes say to myself: "Don't be sad, you will write to her all the more this afternoon, which will give you all the more time to feel really close to her. After all, it is entirely in your own hands." But this, alas, is utterly false. I am far closer to you when I don't write to you, when I am out in the street, and everywhere and incessantly there is something to remind me of you; when alone or among people I press your letter to my cheek and inhale its fragrance, which is the fragrance of your throat—it is then you are more firmly in my heart than ever. Oh God, it is even worse, and it is the hand of my misfortune groping its way to the depths: On the telephone from the Askanische Hof I was closer to you, felt the happiness of our bond with greater intensity than earlier on, when sitting on the tree trunk in Grunewald. Dearest! Dearest! Dearest! Compared to that, how miserable is the name

Franz!

March 31, 1913

It's already late, I am going to bed; to greet you with a few strokes of the pen is all I want, dearest, inconceivably loved one.—I have found that I haven't had enough sleep for years, and shall only get the better of this everlasting tension in my head either through sleep or not at all. I went for a long walk all alone with your last letter; I could have gone with either of two groups of people, but wanted to be alone; in the past I wanted to be alone for reasons of coquetry,

stupidity, laziness, and used to wander about alone and bored, a reasonably lively and healthy young man; today I am alone from necessity and in no small measure from my yearning for you. I left the city far behind, dozed awhile on a sunny slope, crossed the Moldau twice, read your letter several times, tossed stones down from a height, enjoyed wide vistas such as can be seen only in early spring, disturbed loving couples (he lying in the grass, she moving up and down in front of him)—none of this counted, the only thing alive about me was your letter in my pocket.

If only you keep well, dearest—I am so worried. Your request to be exempted from letter-writing makes me suspect that you are not going to the office. Could this be true? Keep well, dearest, I shall never complain again, as long as you keep well. And don't go to bed so late; you looked well, had rosy cheeks, were lively, and yet one could see that you don't get enough sleep. Dearest, let us promise each other until Whitsun always to go to bed at 9. Actually it is now 9:30, but that is not really too late, and I feel fortified by the letter. Well, goodnight, dearest, let us always say goodnight, one to the other, at 9 o'clock.

Franz

April 1, 1913

My one fear—surely nothing worse can either be said or listened to—is that I shall never be able to possess you. At best I would be confined, like an unthinkingly faithful dog, to kissing your casually proffered hand, which would not be a sign of love, but of the despair of the animal condemned to silence and eternal separation. I would sit beside you and, as has happened, feel the breath and life of your body at my side, yet in reality be further from you than now, here in my room. I would never be able to attract your attention, and it would be lost to me altogether when you look out of the window, or lay your head in your hands. You and I would ride past the entire world, hand in hand, seemingly united, and none of it would be true. In short, though you might lean toward me

far enough for you to be in danger, I would be excluded from you forever.[78]

If this be true, Felice—and to me there seems to be no doubt—then surely I had good reason to want with all my might to part from you six months ago, and moreover good reason to fear any conventional bond with you, since the consequences of any such bond could only be the severing of my desire from the feeble forces that still sustain me—who am unfit for this earth—on this earth today.

I am stopping, Felice, I have written enough for today.

Franz

I was about to get undressed when my mother came in on some trifling errand, and on her way out offered to kiss me goodnight, which hasn't happened for many years. "That's good," I said. "I never dared," said my mother, "I thought you didn't like it. But if you do like it, I like it very much, too."

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

April 2, 1913

I, dearest, become estranged? I who die of longing for you here at my desk? While washing my hands outside in the dark passage today, I was somehow so overcome by the thought of you that I had to step across to the window to seek some comfort, if only from the gray sky. This is how I live.

Franz

April 4, 1913

[Presumably during the night of April 3–4, 1913]

It could easily be mere chance, Felice, that I have no news of you today, since you moved house[79] yesterday and probably didn't have a moment to spare. On the other hand it doesn't seem like mere

chance; perhaps it indicates a necessary measure forever. Perhaps I shall never get another letter.[a] But surely I can indulge my need for writing to you, which has its roots in the very center of my existence, until my letters are returned unopened. If only you could see the creature who writes to you, and the deranged condition of his brain!

Franz

April 4, 1913

For the past month or two a Czech writer has been living next door to us. He is a teacher and author of erotic novels, at least this is the subtitle of his most recent book, and on the title page there is a picture of a lady juggling with burning hearts. I think *Burning Hearts* is also the title of the book. I don't really know why I always picture this man, without concerning myself with him in any way, as a little black creep. And then, the other day, I heard a Czech novelist make some remark about our neighbor that was by no means contrary to my idea of him. He said that erotic novels written by a dried-up little teacher with no experience of the world and from his little hole in the ground are bound to be somewhat ridiculous. Just now in the elevator I met him face to face for the first time. What a magnificent, enviable man! The Czechs, you know, are very much inclined to emulate the French; and although this tendency usually lags behind and adopts the outmoded ways of the beloved country (for only experience that has already been digested is accessible to the alien), this fact is least injurious to the imitators of the French, for France is based on tradition; all progress there is very gradual, proceeding on its course while discarding virtually nothing, so that the imitator can almost keep pace without exerting himself, or at least he manages to remain lovable. And there is this man with his natty little French goatee, and a slouch hat straight from Montmartre, and a flowing overcoat over his arm, and pleasant, engaging movements, a lively expression—he is a pleasure to behold.[80]

And here I am, back again with myself, Felice, dearest Felice, here I am, attempting to string along on little stories such as this. Dearest, I've got your telegram; at first it seemed to be worded in some secret code. You received my letter on Thursday, yet you send such a nice, sweet, calm telegram that with all my might I have to stop myself believing the words, and allow myself to be calmed, especially since Max, in other but nevertheless similar respects, also tried to calm me this evening, and for the time being almost succeeded. Dearest, that letter you got on Thursday is utterly sincere in what it says. At the moment I am so addled that I myself could almost mistrust it, and ironically it seems to me untrustworthy. But no, dearest, dearest, it is the truth; these are not fantasies but facts. This is the way it is, precisely.

Franz

[IN THE LOWER MARGIN] And with all this I forget to wish you luck in your new apartment.

April 4, 1913

[Presumably during the night of April 4–5, 1913]

The night before last, or the one before that, I dreamed continually about teeth; they were not orderly teeth in a mouth, but a mass of teeth fitted together, exactly as in children's jigsaw puzzles, and the whole lot, guided by my jaw, were in some kind of sliding motion. I mustered all my strength to express something which, above all else, was very close to my heart; the movement of these teeth, the gaps between them, their grinding, the sensation when guiding them—all this was in some way closely related to some thought, some decision, a hope, a possibility, which I was trying to grasp, hold on to, and realize, by means of this continual biting. I made a great effort, at times it seemed possible, at times I thought I was well on the way to success, and in the morning, when I was finally to wake up, with my eyes half-open, it seemed as though everything had

been successful, the long night's labor had not been in vain, the final unalterable disposition of teeth had an undoubtedly auspicious significance, and it seemed incomprehensible that I had not recognized this during the night, and had been so desperate, indeed had even thought vivid dreams to be detrimental to sleep. But then I was fully awake (our governess keeps exclaiming how late it is in her moaning, reproachful voice), and so after all nothing had been achieved, the misery of the office was about to begin again, and you, dearest, though I didn't know it at the time, had spent the night with toothache.

Do you know, dearest, this mixture of happiness and unhappiness of which my relationship with you consists (happiness—because you have not yet forsaken me, and should you forsake me, you have liked me once; unhappiness—because I am failing so miserably in the test of my worth, this test that you personify for me) sends me chasing around in circles as though I were the most useless being on this earth. Every inhibition that has so far held me back (every man has to endure tests, there are few that I have passed successfully, and none has been as great or as decisive as this one) seems to be crumbling; I go about in a state of pointless despair and rage, not so much against my environment, against my destiny, against that which is above us, but only and passionately against myself, against myself alone. I am probably worst off at the office; this really ghostly activity at my desk closes in on me; I accomplish nothing; sometimes I feel like throwing myself at the director's feet and begging him to have the decency not to sack me. Of course, hardly anyone notices any of this. And everything may be better as from the day after tomorrow; I shall be working with a gardener in the afternoons; I will tell you about this shortly.

Franz

April 5, 1913

Yesterday, Felice, I received your letter unexpectedly; when I got home at 7 o'clock in the evening the porter's wife handed it to me

downstairs. The mailman had been too lazy to climb to the 4th floor. How serene and sweet your letter is! As though a guardian angel had escorted me as far as this ultimate step—when I had decided to say, not quite everything, but most things, I used affected and ambiguous words, and yet expected them to be intelligible. But now it is too late to go back, I really cannot treat this final step as a joke if it was sincere and absolutely necessary. Besides, in the letter you received yesterday by the second mail, as well as in the one that will probably reach you today, I said too much; which is undoubtedly why I am without news of you today.[b]

No, Felice, my appearance is not my worst attribute. “If only it were Whitsun!” This wish bursts forth now (now!) in utter madness, now, when I could hardly have a more absurd wish than just that! The day before yesterday I walked past the arrival hall at the railway station. I was thinking of nothing in particular, and hardly noticed the few porters who were standing around, shabbily dressed family men who, as befits this profession in Prague, were wiping their eyes, yawning, and spitting all over the place. Without immediately being aware of the connection, I became envious of them (which in itself would not have been remarkable, since I envy everybody, and take pleasure in imagining myself in everybody’s shoes); only later did I realize that the thought of you contributed to my envy, that probably these same porters had stood there when you lowered your foot from the station threshold onto the sidewalk for the first time, that they were watching when you hired the cab, paid the porter, stepped in, and disappeared. To go running after your cab somewhere in the rush of heavy traffic without losing sight of it or allowing any obstacle to intervene—this might be an undertaking I would be equal to. But what else? Whatever else?

Franz

By the enclosed letter, you can see what a charming publisher I have. He is a very beautiful man of about 25, to whom God has given a beautiful wife, several million marks, the inclination to

be a publisher, and a certain aptitude for the publishing business.

*Enclosed*:
*Kurt Wolff to Franz Kafka*
[LETTERHEAD: Kurt Wolff, Publisher]

April 2, 1913

Dr. Franz Kafka
Prague
Nikolasstr. 36

Dear Dr. Kafka,

I am asking you herewith most cordially and urgently to send me, if possible *at once*, the first chapter of your novel which, according to you as well as Dr. Brod, could well be published on its own. And at the same time please be good enough to send me a copy or the manuscript of the bedbug story. On Sunday I am going abroad for several weeks and would like to have read both before my departure.

I would regard it as a great kindness on your part if you could comply with my wishes.

I hope we shall meet again before long and somewhat more comfortably than the other day in Leipzig.

Yours sincerely, Kurt Wolff[81]

April 7, 1913

Felice, dearest, at last I have got down to this letter; there are some not particularly pleasant guests next door; for the past hour and a half I have been rushing into my room as though you were there. Can you tell by my handwriting that I have done some hard labor today, and that my pen-holder has become too light a thing for me? Yes, for the first time today I worked with the gardener out in Nusle, a suburb, in the cool rain, in nothing but my shirt and

trousers. It has done me good. And it was not so easy to find a job. Though there are any number of vegetable gardens in that neighborhood, they are all open without fencing, in between the houses, and especially in the evening after working hours, hence just when I want to work, there is a lot going on around there—American swings, merry-go-rounds, music; however pretty it may be, I don't like it much as a place to work in, especially since what is grown in these vegetable gardens, which are mostly tiny and owned by poor people, is limited, and so one cannot learn a great deal. Not that I really want to learn anything. My main purpose was to escape self-torture for a few hours—in contrast to my ghostly work at the office, which virtually flies away from me each time I try to grasp it (*real hell is there in the office, no other can hold any terror for me*)—to do some dull, honest, useful, silent, solitary, healthy, strenuous work. But actually these reasons are not strictly honest, for I do not consider the self-torture I constantly practice to be in any way unnecessary; on the contrary, I believe it to be extremely necessary, and for your sake, dearest, it would be a blessing if this torture were to destroy me. But I longed to be rid of the torment for 2 hours, to be free to think of you calmly and happily, and perhaps in the end even earn for myself some rather sounder sleep for the night. But such explanations would have made people suspicious, and possibly no one would have taken me on, so I said I expected shortly to have a garden of my own, and therefore wished to learn something about gardening.

But it's too late, Felice; I'll tell you more tomorrow; train-fever will no doubt make you sleep badly tonight, poor child, but all will be well. Here is someone who has little in his head other than good wishes for you.

Franz

April 8, 1913

You have had a tooth pulled and have been in pain again. Your troubles never cease, and your weariness never leaves you, and yet

to be as fresh as anyone all you need is complete rest. I am always so much inclined to relate to myself any misfortune that may befall you, and to blame myself for it, even if it is as unreasonable as in the case of a toothache. Will you get some peace and quiet in Frankfurt? And have the Bluen couple gone with you? And Frl. Brühl? And will you have a thorough rest? Don't read in bed as late as you did in Prague! Preferably read only poetry, not novels that keep you awake. Tomorrow I will send you Werfel's poems. This will be my reward to Werfel, he deserves it. I got a postcard from him today which, though he has the reputation of being negligent and lazy, he wrote the very moment he received my letter, and in which he, in conjunction with two others who have also written to me, offers to do all he can for Löwy, who is at a very low ebb once again, and is lying in the hospital with those terrible headaches he gets every 3 months as a result of some old nose operation. He left his old company and with the best of intentions, though against my advice, formed a new company that was to have been better than the old, to have staged better plays., but—as is inevitable when people are rounded up at random and in a hurry—turned out to be much worse than the old, and under Löwy's childish management—he was perpetually traveling back and forth with the company between Leipzig and Berlin, getting hardly any sleep—also earned far less money. At this point it was about to collapse: what with the damaging effect of competition from the old and better company, plus the company's ridiculously high debts which Löwy had taken on in his own name (what did his creditors imagine!). All hopes for the future faded. Then, as if this weren't enough, Löwy fell ill. ("God is bountiful," he wrote to me, "when He gives, He gives with both hands.") Needless to say, the company dispersed as quickly as possible, and thus he was left, ill, entirely without funds, heavily in debt, and without any prospects after such complete failure. But this is an old story; I really don't know why I haven't told you about it before; I have had a great many letters from him. Perhaps he will now follow my advice and go to Palestine.

Dearest, I should close now, although I have hardly spoken to you at all. In my mind I accompanied you this morning on your

proposed journey. Never mind; I went to Frankfurt for the second time this afternoon.

Franz

April 8, 1913

So you are in Frankfurt! Dearest, you really are good to write to me despite the pressure of all that work. If I attempted to express my thanks by kissing your hand, my lips would not leave your hand.—I feel as though, as your train advances, my entire being is slowly turning away from Berlin, and toward Frankfurt. Think how interested I was in Oskar's last trip to Berlin, and even his next trip still gripped my heart so long as you were in Berlin, even though I knew that at the time of his trip you would no longer be there. However, you were still in Berlin, and so it was a joy to talk about it. But when I went to see Oskar yesterday—he read some things to me to test their effects for Berlin—I accepted it all as partly excellent work, but my lack of interest in his reading in that uninteresting Berlin positively tired me. Dearest! Yes, I will tell you about my mother before long, I am now writing in great haste. Needless to say, I had to tell her a little (you would be amazed how terribly little) about Berlin, but the same inhibition that kept my lips sealed in Grunewald kept my lips sealed in Prague as well.

Farewell, dearest, and a lot of luck at the exhibition, and a lot of courage in your hotel room.

Franz

[POSTMARK: April 10, 1913]

Before going to bed. Late and weary, I am also very confused again; dearest, please don't expect to hear any more from me today. You are happy in Frankfurt, aren't you? Oh God, to think that I let you travel all alone through the world!

Franz

April 10, 1913

At last I know where you are, Felice. I venture to say “at last” although I was without a letter for only one day, and although you —— But why repeat it all? You don’t resent this coercion I feel obliged to exercise, for surely you must at any rate suspect that the real reason for my longing to keep up an—if possible uninterrupted—exchange of letters is not love, for love would seek to spare you in the state of lamentable tiredness you have been in of late, but is due to my unhappy disposition.

Felice, I don’t want any answers to my letters; I want to hear about you, only about you; I want to see you in as peaceful a frame of mind as if I didn’t exist, or as if I were a different person; indeed, I should have to tremble at the thought that my letters might receive the answers they deserve—but tell me just one thing, Felice, so that I may see clearly from where the decision must ultimately come, tell me: Did you, from that twisted, affected, feeble, stupid letter you got last Thursday, and to which I have referred several times since, did you discover what it was all about? Actually I should not talk about anything else; it is wonderful to enjoy a respite, to look at you and to forget about oneself, but it is irresponsible.

I hadn’t realized that you would be in Hanover. I had thought you were going there after Frankfurt; if I am not mistaken this is what you once wrote. And your sister is in Hanover? Suddenly? Are all her troubles over? The 5 or 6 weeks you once said the decision depended on must have elapsed by now. You stayed in Hanover with your sister, not at a hotel?

You mustn’t expect any very salutary effects from my gardening. Today was my fourth day at work. Needless to say, the muscles become somewhat taut, one’s whole body rather heavier and more erect, and thus self-confidence increases slightly. Of course, it cannot be entirely without significance if a body lacking adequate natural gifts, leading a desk-and-sofa life, and allowing itself continually to be assailed and deeply moved, should for once with a spade become itself the assailant and mover. But the limits of these

effects can already be seen; I shall be writing more about this. Today it's already late; I spent the evening with Max, and tarried too long with those two contented people. I misjudged this marriage to begin with, but the reasons for my error are only too obvious to me.

Franz

April 11, 1913

We are now so far apart, Felice, that I didn't get the picture postcard you seem to have mailed on Wednesday evening, until today, Friday. I am aware of these distances (not just now, for I am completely numbed by a bad story of Friedrich Huch's that I read in the *Neue Rundschau*,[82] but as a rule, for instance when I saw your postcard lying on the table)—no, I am not going on; you see, this is how sometimes everything collapses over my head. Actually, I only wanted to tell you that it occurred to me the other day quite by chance that I could easily be living in Vienna, and how terrible the distance between us would be then, how in Prague it is only just bearable, and what a desolate place way down there Vienna is, although 6 months ago it was closer to Prague than Berlin.

The postcard must have been written at 4 o'clock, you were sitting in the dining car, how clearly I can see you, I can give a description of where you were sitting: If this was the direction in which you were traveling ←, then, seen from that direction, I imagine you sitting at the last or last but one table on the right by the window, facing the engine. I could have drawn it, but then I should have had to leave your seat empty, and I didn't want to do that. Should you maintain that you sat elsewhere, I won't believe it. However I have just noticed that I certainly must have been wrong, for in my imagination I visualized the entire dining car completely empty except for you, and I have to force myself to see the waiter who hands you the picture postcard.

By the way, the other day I had a wildly confused dream about you, and Max and his wife. We were in Berlin, and among other

things we found all the Grunewald lakes, which you couldn't even show me in reality, right in the middle of the town, one behind the other. Perhaps I was alone when this discovery was made, I probably wanted to find you, almost willfully lost my way, and from a jetty saw some kind of strange, grayish black, indefinable apparitions, asked a passerby for information, and learned that these were the Grunewald lakes and that, though right in the middle of the town, I was nevertheless a very long way from you. Then we were also in Wannsee, which you didn't like (in my dream your actual remark kept sounding in my ears); we passed through a wrought-iron gate as into a park or a cemetery, and had many experiences, for the telling of which it is now too late. I should also have to delve too deeply to remember them. Goodnight and happier dreams.

Franz

April 13, 1913

Felice, you've been to Frankfurt since Wednesday afternoon, and only today, Sunday morning, do I hear of it from your postcard. You do understand, Felice, that this is not a reproach; my ties with you are such that there is no room for reproaches; if only you would understand the other things as well. I sometimes think that by your trip to Frankfurt, by the absence of the familiar surroundings in which you received my first letters, from the opportunity for reflecting more clearly upon me, by reading my letters in Frankfurt, a more profound understanding of me could have dawned upon you; should this be so, you would have every reason to bless this trip to Frankfurt. I am not well; I could have built the Pyramids with the effort it takes me to cling on to life and reason.

Franz

April 14, 1913

[Presumably during the night of April 13 to 14, 1913]

How am I to write to you, Felice, after 5 days without a word from you? Well, let me just send you good wishes, and with undisclosed thoughts in my mind, hold your dear hand in mine for a little while. The greater part of Sunday I spent in bed, hardly sleeping at all, which possibly, and in very exceptional circumstances, might be permissible to a young man of 17 as a protest against the world. And while lying there, every cell of one's brain becomes impregnated with disgust!

Franz

[TELEGRAM, SENT FROM PRAGUE, April 14, 1913]

Felice Bauer, Frankfurt am Main, Hotel Monopol Metropole again no news please please a candid word

9:15 P.M. April 14, 1913

I have to write in the presence of my card-playing parents; I am also slightly exhausted by the usual as well as the unusual and yet, Felice—very happy. "But everything is as it was" has a wonderful ring that eclipses the severity that could be detected in "No unnecessary worries, please." I had reached the end of my strength, though that is where I have been most of the time recently, but at that moment I was almost over the edge. I had to say to myself—but why is my pen overflowing? Is everything really as it was, Felice, really everything, really as it was?

You should actually be amazed; in my letters it is my perpetual concern to free you of me, but when for once I seem to have succeeded, I go raving mad. I could not understand why, from a whole week in Frankfurt, only one postcard should reach me; could not understand how you could have so little time, especially when I remember how once, some while ago, you wrote about the possibility of our meeting in Frankfurt, about plenty of free time, trips to the Taunus, etc. Nevertheless I accepted your failure to write; things were coming to an end the way I was coming to the

end. Then yesterday when at Max's and about to leave, something was said quite casually among other things, but owing to some faint connection it brought to my mind the thought that you in Frankfurt, in that very festival hall from which your telegram was sent, might have met some old or even new acquaintance who was detaining you. The representatives of all the firms undoubtedly meet there, distinguished, well-dressed, vigorous, healthy, amusing young men —that is to say, men compared with whom, if I were to be confronted with them for comparison, I would simply have to do away with myself. What could be more natural, I said to myself, than that you should take a liking to one of them, especially since in so doing you would be fulfilling a request expressed in countless letters of mine? Everything would be resolved; I would be precisely where I should have to and seemingly wish to be—i.e., expelled from your presence, as would be my desert, since I did not hold you by your hands, as one holds one's beloved, but clung to your feet and so made walking impossible for you. So why wasn't I satisfied? Why did I get out of bed with my head virtually shriveled up with sleeplessness and breathe freely for the first time only after the telegram had been sent?

Franz

April 17, 1913

I could not write to you last night; I got your letter this morning at the office, your postcard just now at home. You are tired out, shivery, and hoarse, and I have contributed my share to your tiredness. If it ever comes to a reckoning between us, where shall I stand! A sewing woman's terrible appearance has just made my small nephew cry for 15 minutes; after these last few days I feel as dissolved as he does, although in me there is nothing like as much to dissolve as there is in my tough little nephew.—What my letter has failed to achieve won't be achieved by discussion either; that's bad.—Well, a postcard every day? Poor Felice!—Which of the hotel windows is yours?—While reading your letter (and I didn't draw

breath until the end, so as to start reading it again from the beginning), I felt that help for me and for everything lay only with you.

Franz

April 18, 1913

Don't I bother you with my letters, Felice? I'm sure I bother you, it cannot be otherwise. Of necessity you are wrapped up in business matters; the exhibition may be decisive for your firm for a whole year—and then I come along with unconnected, irrelevant things, but mainly with my despair. However, now that I realize it, the exhibition may be over, I think it was supposed to close on the 20th. Well, this mood came over me, and I gave in; I should have resisted more strongly. At this moment, for example, my calm is exemplary, but that of course is not good, either. To write, Felice! If only I could write! I could be a joy to you! But I cannot afford to go to bed as late as 11; only when I go to bed at 10 at the latest do my tattered nerves come near, and then only near, to finding calm. Will I ever be able to write again?

And once more I am forcing myself into your business affairs with things you should not be worried by. I shall stop.

Franz

> How are you returning to Berlin? Stupidly enough I shall be in Aussig again on Tuesday, the 22nd. Couldn't we clasp hands somewhere, or else at least reach out across a somewhat shorter distance? It would do me good from head to foot.

April 20, 1913

Far too long in bed with the gloomiest thoughts and insuperable horror of all preparations, no matter how essential, for the court case in Aussig on Tuesday. I don't know whether you have yet received my last letter in which I tell you about Aussig. Anyway

there is no possibility of our meeting on Tuesday, but this doesn't matter, Felice, provided you are by then out of that dreadful Frankfurt. It kept you from me, and to me it seemed as though you did not protest enough, and then again it seemed as though you protested too much. By now you must be on your way to Berlin, it is 6:30. You know, to send a telegram would be the obvious thing, yet invariably and without exception it remains no more than an excellent idea. From, bed one stretches out one's hand, and there is the piece of paper to be read, and for a short while one is lifted out of the odious orbit of one's thoughts and forcibly carried away. If only I could write, Felice! I am consumed with the desire to do so. Above all, if only I were free enough, and fit enough! I don't think you have properly taken in that writing is the only thing that makes my inner existence possible. No wonder, I always express myself so badly; I am awake only among my imaginary characters, but on this subject I can neither write nor talk convincingly. Nor would this be necessary, provided I had everything else.

And it is still another 3 weeks to Whitsun, who could be cheerful? You say everything will be all right. Well, it won't be for lack of trying on my part.

Franz

April 20, 1913

Well, it's now Sunday evening before going to bed, and in fact nothing as yet prepared for the trial in Aussig, though there will hardly be time to do it tomorrow, and though a thousand things should be neatly arranged in my head for these complicated pleadings if I wish to go there with even the slightest hope of success, or at least being more or less confident of not making a fool of myself. But I can't, I can't. Well, if it were only a question of studying the files, but between me and this task there are rocks to indicate my reluctance, and I would first have to clear these away. I can't. Haven't you noticed, Felice, that in my letters I don't in fact love you; if I did, I would have to think only of you, write only

about you; but what I do is worship you, and in some way expect your help and blessing for the most absurd things. What other reason could there be, for example, for telling you about my trip to Aussig?

The letter I wrote this afternoon will arrive torn; I tore it on my way to the station in my impotent rage at being unable to write to you frankly and clearly, frankly and clearly no matter how I try; with the result that even in writing I never once succeed in holding on to you and in somehow communicating to you *the rhythm of my heartbeat*, and therefore I can have no expectations beyond my letters. This afternoon for instance I wrote that I am awake only among my imaginary characters, or words to this effect. That of course is wrong and exaggerated, and yet the truth, the only truth. But in this way I never make it clear to you; to myself, however, I make it repugnant. And yet I must not lay down my pen, though that would be the best thing to do; instead I am compelled to try again and again, and again and again it is bound to fail, and to collapse on top of me. This is why I partly tore the letter, and should have torn it completely and should tear every one of my letters, because it would be just the same, or rather it would be better if only the tatters of my letters were to reach you.

By now you must be back in Berlin, which for me is coming to life again, and in my imagination occupies once again the dignified and almost exalted position it has held for the past 6 months.

Franz

[ON THE FIRST PAGE IN THE LEFT-HAND MARGIN] I'm told there was something rather pleasant about *Meditation* in Wednesday's *Berliner Tageblatt*; I haven't read it, I only heard about it today.[83]

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Aussig, April 22, 1913]

One of our Institute's engineers who is a witness at today's trial, while I shall be a kind of prosecutor, is sitting opposite me and still wants quickly to discuss a number of things; I insist, however, that I must first (at this moment he is reading to me) write a postcard, otherwise the trial is bound to turn out badly. Kindest regards.

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Aussig, April 22, 1913]

Now it has turned out badly, though it's not quite over yet. What can one do, it's not my fault, so don't be cross! I don't mind very much anyway, for after all a letter is waiting for me in Prague, and that's really the main thing.

FK

April 26, 1913

I hadn't time to write to you, Felice? No, not that, nor am I physically in worse shape than usual. And I certainly had no wish to worry you deliberately, nor deliberately to forego writing to you, and still less deliberately to forego getting your replies. But—please listen to me quietly—what I wanted to give you was time to consider carefully your relationship with me—for, to judge from what you have said since Easter (with the possible exception of the first two letters), I was forced to believe (please, Felice, just put yourself in my place for one moment and look at everything in the way I am forced to see it) that I am now able to keep you only by artificial means, by dispatching one letter after another, and thus not giving you time to come to your senses, and thereby urging you in your haste to use old words deprived of their old meaning. This is not my final word, for with each new letter from you even my strongest convictions begin to waver anew, but if it were so, it would really have been the only way in which you had ever disappointed me, or could possibly ever have disappointed me,

because candor is the one thing I have expected from you at all times. I wouldn't have been surprised if at some time you had dismissed me, because you could not immediately have known me for what I am, indeed this was impossible; it was almost as though I had approached you sideways and it took some little time before we turned to face each other. Now of course I don't know what your final decision may be, but only imagine that I can sense it in your recent letters, and the one thing I cannot understand, Felice, is that you yourself shouldn't know how you feel about it. You must not imagine that all I am saying is due to your letters being short and infrequent; you used to write short letters every now and again and I was quite happy and satisfied. But your recent letters are different. My affairs are no longer as important to you, and what is much worse: you no longer bother to tell me about yourself. So what am I to do? I could no longer reply to these recent letters, and pictured you at the office on Thursday morning, sighing with relief on discovering that at long last there was no letter.

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

April 28, 1913

It's impossible to postpone writing; surrounded as I am by all the books and papers from which with the emptiest of heads I am about to prepare a lecture on "Methods for the Prevention of Accidents," I have to answer you. So I wanted to hurt you, Felice? Hurt? You? When my one desire is to lessen as best I can all the unhappiness which, through no fault of mine, passes from me to you! And now your letter is so very weary and sad. How are things with you? What's wrong with you, poor one? Am I really such an infernal idiot? Do you imagine I would have written as I did at the very first inkling of fear? I thought I had any number of proofs, but I don't want to enumerate them. Nor is there time for it now; when I had read your letter I felt a jolt as though I had been put back into the world, after having been outside it for a long time.

By then I was prepared for everything, especially since there was no letter yesterday. I am not ashamed to say that I took it to be helplessness on your part, helplessness in another sense.

*At home*

Felice, tell me, isn't it terrible that there is some trouble in your life, and I am excluded from it! Don't I have to be jealous of the trouble that grips you? But lately you have ceased altogether from mentioning this trouble. I had almost forgotten about it. In your letters you kept saying: "in haste" and "again in haste"; my eyes began to ache at the very sight of these words.

And here was I, roaming around with no letter from you, no letter for you. And I put up with it. There must be some energy left in me. But then I kept myself under rigid control. Without being quite aware of it, I was in fact more active than usual; to stop or give in would have been fatal. I imagined all kinds of things that I don't even wish to talk about. But there is one thing I can tell you: I was determined, if no letter arrived, to write a letter explaining to you how an infinite variety of human relationships can exist, and that the indifference (at best, that is) you feel for me would be no reason to forsake me altogether. I meant to suggest we might even say "*Sie*" to each other again; I meant to return your letters on condition that you kept mine—but this would still be no reason for you to forsake me. And all the same you should allow me to come and see you in Berlin at Whitsun, for this journey was far too definite a plan, the changing of which would turn my whole life upside down. And this reception for your future sister-in-law, which in one of your last letters seemed to be mentioned almost as an obstacle to our meeting, would surely, if you so wished, allow you half-an-hour's free time. Incidentally, I don't understand these receptions.

Needless to say, my resolutions were not absolutely firm. For example, I definitely intended to telephone you yesterday, though I didn't know for what purpose, for since you didn't even want to answer in writing, you would hardly, or so it seemed to me, want to answer by word of mouth. And yet I wanted to telephone. Imagine:

to hear your voice, on any ordinary afternoon! But among your letters I couldn't find the one in which I thought I remembered you having noted your telephone number. It was probably only on an envelope. But among the numbers that appear on your office letterhead I didn't know which to choose; I might have selected, of all people, your director's.

By then, however, I had formed a new resolution, and gave up the idea of telephoning. I intended to go and see Max in the evening, and to ask him to write to you. I wanted to show him your last 3 letters, tell him what I had written to you, and in addition tell him about a very stupid theory I had evolved to explain your conduct, and then beg him to ask you. I thought you would be certain to tell him the truth, since as far as he is concerned there would be no obstacles. He was to have written the letter at once, and I intended to put it on the train that evening. So at 8:30 I went to Max's, but no one was in; I walked up and down the street for 45 minutes; but they didn't return, and even if they had, it would have been too late for my request. So I went home, and, however sad my failure of last night may have made me, I am now very glad you have been spared Max's letter, which would have arrived this morning.

So will you take me on again, dearest? For the umpteenth time? I must admit, however, that even with today's letter in my hand, I would still come to the same conclusion if I were to relive this past month. And this in spite of knowing that in any untroubled relationship this very lack of trust is the worst thing one person can do to the other. I know it from the past when, months ago, you once wrote something that showed a lack of trust, but that was only once, whereas I never stop. Felice! And Whitsun? I no longer even dare to kiss you, and shall never kiss you. I am not worthy of it.

Franz

[ABOVE THE LETTERHEAD ON THE FIRST PAGE] Shall I receive a kind word from you on Thursday? If so, you would have to send it express. It's a

holiday, and there is only one delivery. But I shall be at the office until 12.

April 29 to 30, 1913

It's late now. I went to a Yiddish performance with Max, his wife, and Weltsch, but hurried out before the end in order to send you a few lines. What a lovely feeling to be allowed to do it! What a lovely feeling to be in your safekeeping when confronted by this fearful world which I venture to take on only during nights of writing. Today I thought that one had nothing to complain of so long as one lived with this dual feeling: that someone one loves is well disposed toward one, and that at the same time one had boundless possibilities of doing away with oneself at any moment.—Dearest, how do you visualize my Whitsun visit? The other day before going to sleep I had a wonderful idea, but it is wonderful only before going to sleep, and yet can be carried out only in broad daylight. But I won't reveal it until you have answered the following questions. Shall I call on your family at Whitsun? And how do you imagine that should be done?

Having presented you with these difficulties, I am going to bed, fairly calm, if it weren't for your troubles that still seem to depress you.

Yours

April 30, afternoon

This morning in haste (I am appropriating that word and not returning it to you) I took the wrong letter, and must now send this one express. Before doing so I quickly kiss your dear hand, though it didn't put a single line on paper for me yesterday.

May 1, 1913

No letter. Could I have misunderstood the telegram in spite of having read it so many times, in spite of its having spent the night

under my pillow? Dearest, shut your eyes to the fact that I send you nothing but reproaches, nasty and ungrateful creature that I am. But listen, although I am at the office my heart is actually beating in the letter which I assume to be waiting at home. And then I hurry home and it isn't there, and so my sentence is pronounced: I shall have to wait at least one more day and one more night. I really don't want to pester you; it's summer, you shouldn't write much, nor should you worry if for once you haven't written—all right, let us make a pact that I am to get but one letter per week, on Sundays, *but without fail*, whether you are moving house, or there is an exhibition or some other disaster (in my sense of the word); in fact a letter you can write and add to whenever you have the time or inclination, but one that will finally have to be mailed every Saturday morning. Will you be so kind? So that I won't have to go on waiting, so that the time will pass more smoothly and less slowly, for here the clocks strike only when there is a letter from you. Also, my head will improve; although it looks as if I had invented this headache on the spur of the moment in support of my request, I do really have it. Or rather, not so much a headache as indescribable tension. I ought to be writing, says the doctor within. Write, though my head is so unsteady, and though a short time ago I had occasion to recognize the inadequacy of my writing. Yes, I haven't told you yet that a very short book of mine (47 pages) is to be published next month, the page proofs are right here. It is called *The Stoker: A Fragment*, and is the first chapter of that unfortunate novel. It will appear in an inexpensive series which Wolff is publishing and which will be given the somewhat ludicrous title "The Day of Judgment," 80 pfennigs each volume. I rather dislike the whole idea, as I do any useless contrivance of a unity that isn't really there. But first of all I am indebted to Wolff, secondly he practically wormed the story out of me, and thirdly he was kind enough to guarantee to publish "The Stoker" later on, together with your story and another in one larger volume.[84]—The moment I talk about anything other than you, I feel as though I were lost.

Franz

May 2, 1913

You still misunderstand me, Felice, even in this trifling matter. How could I possibly be cross if you send me such a very friendly postcard? Only those tiny little sentences you wrote, especially from Frankfurt, which contained neither information nor explanation and hardly a greeting, but only haste, nothing but haste, and seemed—seemed! seemed!—to start with a sigh of vexation and end with a sigh of relief (I have to air all my complaints to you, since you are my dearest one, hence also my complaints about you)—it was only these little letters that upset me so much.

But now your brother's engagement—I haven't even congratulated you, but you may be jealous of your sister-in-law, in which case there's no cause for congratulation—seems to preoccupy you. And this, considering the two short holidays at Whitsun, is very sad. What shall we do in those two days? I tell you, I have almost stopped thinking about those two days, but think instead about the horrible period to follow, when, short of some great miracle, I won't see you for a very long time, unless you come to Italy with me, or at least to Lake Garda, or perhaps even to Spain to see my uncle.[85] I ask you, Felice, to think it over quickly and carefully. I would not have mentioned my wish to call on your parents, for neither do I look nor am I more presentable now than I was 2 months ago, but what I feared above all was a repetition of our momentary meetings, of being in Berlin and lying on a sofa for up to 5 hours waiting for that uncertain telephone call. As for your brother, I ought to be faintly familiar to him; did you tell him at the time who I am, or how else did you explain our meeting? Anyway, everything is a little easier now that you no longer live so far away.[86] But still, just think it over, think it over! My head refuses to.

Franz

May 3, 1913

Just now when I sat down to write to you I kept saying "dearest" to myself, and didn't realize it till later. If only, just for once, I could

make you understand what you mean to me! And for that matter I am even less capable of doing it when we are close than when we're far apart.

This afternoon I went for a walk all by myself; hands in pockets I strolled a long way up the river. I didn't feel well; I had to keep telling myself that I may always have felt unwell in the same way, that the same ghosts have always been at work, but that my powers of resistance used to be much greater, and were now becoming increasingly weaker, until the resistance becomes mere sham and finally would cease altogether. It is true that I used to marvel at the soundness of my head which apparently managed to shake everything off from sheer lack of comprehension, but perhaps it wasn't just lack of comprehension, rather that soundness which vanished long ago. I have just spent a whole hour with my family with the sole object of trying to find my way back from my isolation, but I did not find the way.

My walk ended—I hadn't been in that particular neighborhood for years—at some miserable shack on the river. The roof was so dilapidated that it just managed to cling on precariously; the small garden was rather better cared for, and seemed to be of rich damp soil. In retrospect it strikes me as having been strangely dark, but it did lie in a hollow, and when I peered in, it was dark anyway as a thunderstorm was about to break. Although the whole place didn't look very tempting, I started to plan nevertheless. The shack should not be too expensive, one could buy the lot, build a decent little house, improve the garden, lay steps down to the river, which is fairly wide there, with an open view into the distance beyond the far bank; down below one could moor a boat, and altogether might lead a more peaceful and contented life than in town, which is within easy reach by tram. (A nearby cement factory with a lot of smoke discharge is the one thing that might make one hesitate.) These were the only comforting thoughts to intrude on my long walk.

Franz

May 4, 1913

Why does writing to you not affect me more, why doesn't it alleviate the fits of despair I get into at times at the thought of your being so far away, those fits of despair that have become more than ever unbearable now, before my trip to Berlin, for what is going to happen after this Whitsun?

So you want me to call on your family? In that case answer the following questions in good time: What is your telephone number? I assume it can't be in the book yet? Must I wear a black suit, or will it be good enough if I arrive as a chance visitor in my ordinary summer suit? I should much prefer the latter, or rather the former would be almost impossible. Do I arrive with flowers for your mother? And what kind of flowers?

I shall again be staying at the Askanische Hof. And again I shall probably arrive at 11 [P.M.], but quite apart from the fact that this is uncertain (I have a lot of work to do at the office, work I am less and less able to cope with, anyone else would dispose of it all with ease), I implore you not even to think of coming to meet me. On arriving anywhere I am always in a terrible state, and you wouldn't be pleased if, from a sense of insecurity, absentmindedness, weariness, despair, and love, I fell into your arms right there in the station. So please don't even think of it!

You say at Whitsun the mornings will have to be spent at the receptions, which means Monday as well.[87] That's bad. And I shall be leaving again on Monday evening. I shan't be able to stay any longer.

Briefly, my "wonderful" idea is as follows: Provided you agree, I shall tell your father everything which so far I have been incapable of saying to you, and secondly everything I have already said and written to you, which you haven't taken seriously enough. That is my plan. With what knowledge you have of yourself, of your father, and of me, do you think it feasible? Yesterday, apropos of something, Felix said that I could do with a guardian. That's not a bad idea, I could do with one both in the ordinary and the most sublime sense, though it may be too late.

Franz

[IN THE MARGINS OF THE FIRST AND FOURTH PAGES] Please answer all my questions!

Did you get two letters from me on Friday? You didn't reply to one of my suggestions.

Don't lick the indelible pencil, as you did in your last letter but one!

May 7, 1913

The way Felice is being harassed and dragged about, *and all for nothings*! You know my complaints about it, I won't repeat them.

So I am not to see you on Sunday morning, Felice? Only hear your voice? A pleasure indeed, which could fill a morning, had I but more than two mornings. But to attend the reception would be rather too fantastic, don't you think? I am a stranger, knowing neither hosts nor guests, and would be offering my congratulations to an engaged couple whom I hadn't met until that moment—even so, in principle I ought to have no objections, since I am certainly no better at coping with everyday situations; on the contrary. So if it is possible from the point of view of the party, then it is certainly possible from mine, for I would see you for a little longer, and that is good enough reason for me. But should it be impossible for me to see you, and should you, which is most likely, be dragged around by a lot of people, then I would gladly forego the whole thing, especially since I cannot imagine that it could pass off without some minor unpleasantnesses for you. But since you nevertheless mention the possibility of this visit—but no, you never considered it carefully, you were distracted by the overseas mail on your desk. But you did once write that I might accompany you to the Heilborns' (there are 4?), and this would be best of all, and this is what I ask of you.

Of course you can telephone me any time you like; no doubt it won't be possible for you before 9 o'clock, and from 9 o'clock on I shall be ready, but if for instance you wanted to telephone me at 7 in the morning, you need only write and say so, and at 7 I shall be

in the telephone booth like a soldier in his sentry box. But in any case I should like to have your telephone number.

Needless to say, my stories for your father were no more than an idea; it couldn't be carried out; it was a dream.

I have but one fear: that just because of my possible visit to your parents, I will have less of you than if I came to see you alone.

Franz

[IN THE LOWER MARGIN OF THE SECOND PAGE] Please send to my office the letter you may have intended for me for Saturday; I shall be there the whole morning, and it certainly wouldn't arrive at the apartment before Sunday.

May 8, 1913

My letters to you, Felice, are now expected to help me in all kinds of ways; writing this letter, for example, is supposed to dispel my annoyance at just having smashed my nice shaving-mirror.

I didn't mean to punish you, Felice; after all, even in my wildest dreams I cannot imagine that my not writing could constitute any kind of punishment; so far I haven't written you many gratifying letters, and to omit an ungratifying one can hardly be a punishment. My reason for not writing was rather that I realized that waiting in vain for a letter from you is partly so unbearable because writing and not getting an answer seems to create a breach—instead of a letter there comes through the air a cry of "Enough! Enough!"—whereas if I don't write either, everything remains beautifully poised as before, with the one sad exception that I have no news of you. And because I am so very frail and womanish just now, and the tension about my head never ceases, as though the skull were too small, I pampered myself by not writing. It was not right, nor has it done much good.

Why on earth have you always so much to do at the office? Aren't your clients in Leipzig and Frankfurt already satiated with Parlographs?

On my way home from the office today (with a colleague who is as nice as he is amusing; he wore his overcoat loose on his shoulders, and I dragged him by his empty sleeve all the way along the Graben at the double), I saw a girl completely engrossed in conversation; her open, friendly, lively face was smiling with a smile so like yours that I almost took it for a greeting from you. Actually there are many likenesses in the world, which is rather reassuring, though disquieting too, because one looks for them.

Now look, Felice, you've got our families mixed up! It's yours that plays 66, here they play a different game: Franzefuss. But this is among the least of one's worries; in the long run my parents put up with more from me than I from them, though undoubtedly they are well able to stand more.

Today for instance I feel particularly wretched; if I'm not in better form when I make my entry into Berlin, well—! You must admit that I know how to make myself attractive.

Franz

[May 10, 1913]

A pleasant Sunday morning, Felice! Sent from Prague, and to be confirmed in Berlin.

Franz

But will I be able to see you alone? If only no one knew about it.

May 12 to 13, 1913

I have just arrived, Felice, so it is rather late, but I have to write to you; I think of nothing but you, everything I saw on my journey I connected with you, and the impression each thing made was conditioned by the friendliness or unfriendliness of this connection. We still have so much to discuss, Felice! My head is reeling. The journey has made me realize that there is no way of recognizing things except in each other's presence. I am really very confident just now, you know; we still have a number of terrible things to discuss, but then we might really be out of the wood. You know, after all, how invariably I lead you along unattractive paths, even if there is a beautiful lake nearby. Is this due entirely to it being so late at night? While packing my bag in Berlin I had other words in mind. "I cannot live without her, nor with her," and with these words I threw one thing after another into the bag, and felt something was about to explode in my breast.

But I won't be able to solve it now, will I? It is just on 1 o'clock. All I can do now is imagine that your dear hand is in mine. Were the two fingers that were raised when floating upward in the elevator making a vow?

Franz

[IN THE LOWER MARGINS OF THE LAST TWO PAGES] One request! The request of a poor human being who cannot bear uncertainty. If you intend to

write more than once a week, then let it be one letter to arrive on Wednesdays, and another on Sundays. Yes?

May 13, 1913

Who knows whether I shall get a letter tomorrow, and how you, dearest, dearest Felice, have reacted to the craziness of my behavior during those two days in Berlin. You don't know, Felice, you don't know what it is that imprisons me and makes me the unhappiest of men, in spite of seeming to be very close to you—you, my sole purpose on this earth. Oh God, I wish you were not on this earth, but entirely within me, or rather that I were not on this earth, but entirely within you; I feel there is one too many of us; the separation into two people is unbearable. Then why, Felice, don't I take you to me at once, at least as close as physical space will allow? Why instead do I squirm on the forest ground like one of those animals you are so frightened of? There must be a reason, mustn't there? On the other hand I am not exactly an enchanted prince either, even if enchanted princes are in the habit of being concealed in abominations of that kind; it would be good enough and marvelous if I were simply an enchanted tolerable man. You would be content, wouldn't you?

But as long as I have to battle with such things, which can hardly be rendered in human terms—and for weeks not one ounce of my strength has been used for any other purpose—what shall I do when I don't feel sure of you, when you bewilder me? It is so terribly easy to understand it if you were to give up with a sigh; if I were you I'd have run to the other end of the earth; but you are not I, your nature is to act; you are energetic, quick-thinking, observant; I saw you at home (the way you once raised your head at some remark!), I saw you among strangers in Prague, you were always sympathetic, yet sure of yourself—but when you are with me, you flag, turn your head or stare at the grass, endure the silly things I say as well as my many well-founded silences, do not seriously wish to know anything about me, but simply suffer, suffer, suffer—Felice, how do you think I feel when we have parted? Do you imagine I don't sympathize

with you? Do you imagine that life means anything to me at that point?

That time when Max was in Berlin and talked to you on the telephone[88] you are alleged, and I can well imagine it, to have been very gay and confident, to have laughed a great deal, but among other things to have said: “I don’t know why it is, he writes to me fairly often, but his letters never come to the point, I don’t know what it’s all about, we haven’t come any closer to each other, and for the moment there is no hope.” And yet that was at the very beginning, at a time when one draws closer by leaps and bounds, because one is still covering the great, obvious, generally accessible distances that separate any one human being from another. Nevertheless, this is how you felt even then, whereas at that time I was filled with secret and infinite delight at having come by only a few leaps so close to this idolized being. And today, might you still feel what you said then? Your eyes, your words, your silences seem to prove it, but nearly everything else seems to contradict it. But the former is more obvious. How shall I find my way, and in this resignation may I touch even the tips of your fingers?

Yours (were I but nameless, totally obliterated and only yours)

May 15, 1913

Where is Eberswalde?[89] Far from Berlin? Had you received my registered letter when you wrote the postcard? (Needless to say, I have already had all yours, for I went straight from the station to the office to look; from the moment I stepped out of the house at 5 A.M., my entire journey was organized with that in mind; even so, it was very good of you to send postcards to both places—now I think there is no room for further gratitude between us.) But of course these postcards are not the answer to that letter; I will be getting an answer, Felice, won’t I? I do beg you for it. It is so important to have an answer to it, you surely realize this, dearest, dearest! Without it my idea of you would be shattered. All right, you will answer; I won’t mention it again.

How is your family? My impressions of them are very confused, probably due to the fact that your family presented an aspect of total resignation so far as I am concerned. I felt so very small while they all stood around me like giants with such fatalistic expressions on their faces (with the exception of your sister Erna, to whom I instantly felt drawn). It was entirely in keeping with the situation: you are theirs, so they are big, you are not mine, so I was small; but surely that was only the way 7, not they, saw it; so how—despite all their kindness and hospitality—did they come to adopt this attitude? I must have made a very nasty impression on them; I don't want to know about it; all I want to know is what your sister Erna said, even if it was very critical or malicious. Will you tell me that?

Franz

[IN THE LOWER MARGIN] Max's old review[90] happens to be at hand; I am sending it to you with a sigh. Comparisons! Comparisons!

[May 16, 1913]

Dearest, listen! Do not stray from the path by which you were coming toward me! But should you have to, then turn back! Tell me, do you feel how much I love you? Do you feel it in spite of all that which now—and more so in Berlin than from afar—keeps me hidden from you? My love makes the words stick in my throat and floods every syllable I mean to write.

Franz

There was no letter, perhaps because today is a holiday.[91]

Friday[c] evening. I can easily mistake the days I spend away from you, they have no meaning for me. I feel as though the whole world had crashed into you. Love me a little, Felice. What you give me in the way of love is the blood that flows through my heart, I have none of my own.

When is your father coming back? I think a great deal about the letter; as a result it's bound to be bad; like everything I try to arrive at by a process of thought, bad, i.e., a bad mixture of clarity and ambiguity. Nevertheless—at this moment nothing is of greater importance in my life. I will write it in such a way that you will be able to read it; I will send it to you first for your appraisal. So when will your father be back, and when is the most opportune moment?

But even this loses its importance in face of the letter I hope to find first thing tomorrow at the office.

Yours, F.

May 18, 1913

My dearest Felice, is there any purpose (I am saying this from my point of view) in prolonging the torment of uncertainty simply because somewhere it contains a slight, unreasonable, and instantly vanishing consolation? I am not going to wait for your father's return, I may even write the letter this evening, send it to you tomorrow for your scrutiny, and then mail it to your father in Berlin, or wherever he happens to be. After all, the reply to this letter won't be dependent on a mood, nor differ whether written from one place or another. There is no point in waiting.

There may be some point after all, but I don't wish to know it. Dearest, I know I should and can "trust you blindly." But do you know whether you can trust yourself? Whether you can trust yourself in all that is in store for you? I'm sure you must at least have some misgivings. You don't know what it is that inhibits you in relation to me. It is not that you are "a stupid child" (when you are present there is no one I feel more inferior to than you), it is nature itself that inhibits you. But you are going to tell me more about this (*a promise I shall hold you to!*); at bottom I am ready to let myself be convinced by the slightest shaking of your head.

There is one colossal objection to certain concepts of future happiness: eventualities that cannot be foreseen. Just as one thinks one has the right to prove the existence of God by one's own

concept of God, so it can be disproved by the absence of any such concept. Had I but known you 8 or 10 years ago (the past is as undeniable as it is lost), how happy we might be today—no miserable prevarications, no sighs, no hopeless silences. Instead—all this was years ago—there were girls I fell in love with easily, was gay with, and left with even greater ease, or who left me without causing the slightest pain. (It is only the plural that makes them sound so numerous, because I don't give their names, and because it is all so long ago.) There may have been one woman I loved enough to feel shaken to my very depths, that is now 7 or 8 years ago.[92] Since then, though by no means as a result, I have been almost completely detached from everything, more and more confined to myself; my wretched physical state, which—how shall I put it?—preceded or followed my dissolution, helped to submerge me still further, until—when I had almost reached the end—I met you.

Franz

*Enclosed*:

May 18, 1913

Today I came across this old letter[93] of mine, from happier, unhappier days. What do you think of it? Answer as you would have answered then.

Franz

[End of September/beginning of October, 1912]

Fräulein Bauer, I am interrupting my writing at 12:30 at night in order to hold on to you[94] for one moment. I am doing so not because it is essential at this moment; on the contrary, I feel fairly strong just now, otherwise I would never have been able to interrupt my writing. But I am trembling all over, just as the light made the screen tremble in the early days of the cinematograph, as you may remember. For more than a week now I have been too happy, and have suffered too much. I have worked through the first half and drowsed through the second half of several nights past. My office all

day and all kinds of things, and my feeble, wretched self. To whom would it be more healthy to complain just now than you with your great tranquility?

Yours, Franz K.

> Because these nights make one superstitious, and because one overestimates the powers of the once-written word and sees the everlasting multiplication of the once-recorded error, I must add that it is only my suffering, not, heavens above, my happiness that I should like to diminish. But if there is no other way, then let it be as it is. How it affects me to look at you even from afar!

May 23, 1913

My Felice, my dearest, now I have failed to answer one of your letters promptly. Did you really think that? Is that even possible? No, it is not possible, for a letter from you gives me such joy that I cannot refrain from answering at once, no matter how bad things with me may be, and even when I know it would be more sensible not to write. But just imagine, that letter you mailed on Sunday did not reach me until today, Friday. A postmark shows that it had been to Vienna. While I was tormenting myself here, this letter, owing to some inefficient clerk, was on its way to Vienna and slowly back again. And in the course of these long days I thought: Felice is not answering my most important letter, is not answering the question about my letter to her father, has not written Sunday, Monday, or Tuesday, is going to Hanover without my being in any way informed of the purpose of this visit, is not giving me her address in Hanover, hence has no desire to hear from me during her trip, and finally doesn't write a word from this journey—so equally I could not write to you, since your letter that fortunately altered the worst assumptions did not arrive until today. Those were not pleasant days; again and again I had to tell myself that you were being

unintentionally cruel to me, and unintentional cruelty thus prolonged, after all, leaves no hope whatsoever.

But now things have changed, Felice; everything will turn out well, it must turn out well. My letter to your father is not yet finished, or rather it was finished several times, but each time quite unsuitable. It has to be very short and very precise, and that's not easy. I don't intend to hide behind your father; as I said, I want you to read the letter first. But it has got to be written and for the following reason: There exist certain difficulties for me which you are vaguely aware of, but which you don't take seriously enough, and which you wouldn't take seriously enough even if you were fully aware of them. No one I know takes them seriously enough, or they pretend for my sake not to take them seriously. I repeat what has been said often before: For about 10 years I have had this ever-growing feeling of not being in perfect health; the sense of well-being that comes with good health, the sense of well-being created by a body that responds in every way, a body that functions even without constant attention and care, this sense of well-being which in most people is the source of constant cheerfulness, and above all unselfconsciousness—this sense of well-being I lack. And I lack it in every, indeed in every single manifestation of life. And this defect is not due to any specific illness I might have had; on the contrary, apart from children's complaints I have never really been ill enough to stay in bed, perhaps not even ill at all, in any case I cannot remember any such illness. However, this sad state is indeed a fact, it is apparent at almost all times, seems bearable enough from a distance, can be overlooked by friends on occasional meetings, is almost ignored in my family by a conspiracy of silence—but in the most intimate relationships? Just as this condition prevents me from talking naturally, eating naturally, sleeping naturally, so it prevents me from being natural in any way. I can think of nothing that would not frighten me in this respect, and with good reason based on experience. Tell me, can I really—with my intense awareness of all this—burden the person I love best with something I try to spare even people to whom I am indifferent and with whom contact is limited both in time and intensity, whereas with us there would be

no limits? May I ask you outright to grant me a heart-to-heart talk, the need for it is burning me up because I have kept silent about it for so long? May I? And can I rest content merely to ask, when I see the change that comes over you when we are together (though this change can hardly be said to be in my favor, rather to my disgrace), how you, a normally self-assured, quick-thinking, proud girl, are seized with a dull indifference, and how one may in this state, if one feels but a glimmer of responsibility, under no circumstances demand or accept a decision affecting one's own destiny, let alone yours? Oh, how heavily this conflict weighed on me that day in Grunewald, and for that matter, on you too: to be free to say everything, and not to be free to say anything!—From all of which follows: I cannot bear the responsibility, because I regard it as too great; whereas you cannot bear it, because you are hardly aware of it. Miracles, of course, do happen; the fact that you care for me, for instance, is one; so why shouldn't my salvation be another in the succession of miracles which life with you would produce? My hopes in this respect are not so slim as not to reduce my responsibility, but the responsibility in itself is, and remains, too great.

This is why I want to write to your father now. Neither my parents nor my friends could give me adequate advice. They take you too little into consideration, and would only advise me to do what I so obviously want to do: shoulder all responsibilities; or rather it's not that they would advise me, they will advise me (what I long to hear is clearly written in my eyes, even if I don't say so), and the first among them—in her shortsightedness confined chiefly to the moment and to me—is my mother. She knows nothing, and even if she does, her maternal pride and love make it impossible for her to understand; there is no advice to be had there. Your father is the only one who can advise, my visit was very useful in this respect, for there will be no reason for his advice to be prejudiced in my favor. I shall tell him what I am telling you now, but more clearly, and—this sounds rather strange, and is in fact a miserable expedient in my great plight—I shall ask him, provided he doesn't

turn me down altogether, to name a physician whom he trusts, by whom I would then allow myself to be examined.

Franz

From May 23 to 24, 1913

It has got so late owing to Max's latest book, *Petticoat Government;*[95] I will send it to you within the next few days. It includes the story "From a Sewing School," of which I knew only the beginning, and which, regardless of time and lack of sleep, I have just read right through to the end.

Dearest, how is it that I have been without news of you for so long? If you knew how I squeezed everything I wished out of that word "affectionate" in your telegram, though it was only a conventional word! Could something I said in my last letter have offended you? I can hardly believe it, for even if it is silly and seemingly affected to talk in general terms about things of the distant past, surely we know each other well enough for you to realize that when this formless material has been shaped into regular narrative, not a word of it could offend you.

But could your trip have turned out badly? Not so much as a postcard have I received; and yet you have surely written to those at home, to whom you returned on Friday and who cannot possibly have worried about you as much as I did.

No further reproaches, my Felice, but never be angry with me; there may be cause for it, but it is never intended. You wouldn't believe the kind of person I could become if you wanted it. If only the hand by which I feel spiritually guided were held firmly in mine!

Franz

May I send my regards to your mother, and your brother and sisters? Tell your mother: The trip had both meaning and purpose, but lacked the man to accomplish either.

You must have had my express letter?

[IN THE LOWER LEFT MARGIN] The "announced Fräulein B." is wonderful; do send me things from your office occasionally.

May 25, [1913]

For heaven's sake, why on earth don't you write to me? Not a word for a whole week. It really is dreadful.

May 27, 1913

So this is the end, Felice; you dismiss me with your silence, and put an end to all hope for the only kind of happiness I am capable of in this world. But why this terrible silence, why not an honest word, why for weeks past have you been noticeably, so awfully noticeably, fretting about me? It is no longer compassion on your part, for even if I were an utter stranger, you couldn't help realizing that the uncertainty makes me suffer so much that at times I am almost out of my mind; nor can it be compassion if it ends in this silence. Nature takes its course, nothing can be done about it, the more I came to know you, the more I loved you, the more you came to know me, the more insufferable you thought me. If only you had realized it, if only you had said so openly, if only you had not delayed until it has become impossible for you, until you can no longer bring yourself to write even one single word from a five-day trip, or reply with even one single line to letters in which I ask for a decision, or, in my misery at not having heard from you for so long, find some way of comforting me. Yet even yesterday when I called you to the telephone you said, though I caught but very little, for owing to the joy at hearing your voice there was too much buzzing in my ears: You had written to me on Sunday evening, and today, Tuesday, at latest, your letter would be at the apartment. No, nothing came; you wrote neither on Sunday, nor even on Monday after the telephone conversation; you cannot write, but you also cannot say that you cannot write. Now when I think that the only

spontaneous thing you said to me yesterday was to ask me how I am, then really my mind becomes unhinged. I cannot go on living in this way. It is probably no longer necessary to urge you, yet I do ask you explicitly not to write to me any more, not a word; do as your heart bids. I shan't write to you either; there will be no reproaches; you won't be troubled any more, and there is but one thing I ask you to remember: no matter how long the silence is preserved, in response to the *faintest but genuine* appeal I am yours, today as always.

Franz

May 28, 1913

No, I am not anxious, Felice; that is not the right word. But you don't want me, you don't want me, nothing could be more obvious; but if after all you do want me, then this wish remains completely hidden by its half heartedness. To feel I am holding your hand while for 10 days you keep entirely aloof—this I cannot bear. I endured the Frankfurt silence without receiving from you any explanation for it; this latest silence is too much for me, and so it would be for someone 10 times more robust. I have no wish to spell out all the other things that support my interpretation, though in the end I have to admit that I do not understand you. I have done you an injustice; you actually did write on Sunday evening (I didn't get the letter until today, the post office official's hands must be as unsteady as my own), but the contents of the letter cancel my injustice. In the letter you received on Monday I let out a cry of despair; you had nothing to write. Tuesday—again nothing, and I have good reason to believe that a letter from Max was responsible for today's telegram. There is no alternative but to take my leave which, between the lines of your letters, and in the intervals between these letters, you gave me long ago. I repeat, Felice: I am wholly yours, you could never have possessed anything so completely, but within this relationship of ours, as it is now and has been for the past weeks, I can no longer be yours, for it cannot be your true self that

wants to continue this kind of relationship which merely makes you suffer—for you are certainly not cruel—and in which I feel hounded to death. This is what I still had to tell you.

Franz

June 1, 1913

What will become of us, my poor dearest? You know, if Löwy weren't here and I didn't have to organize a recital[96] for the poor fellow (a notice, suggested by me and written by Pick, is enclosed, and there are other things of this kind to be done), and didn't have to sell tickets and busy myself about the hall, and finally if Löwy's unquenchable fire hadn't infected me and given me a semblance of speed and activity—I don't know how I should have got through these last few days. After all, we do belong together, there seems to be no doubt about that, but equally there is no doubt that we are immensely different, that you are healthy in every sense of the word, and as a result calm in your innermost being; whereas I am ill, perhaps not so much in the generally accepted sense, but consequently in the worst possible sense of the word, hence I am restive, absentminded, and listless. There are undoubtedly differences between your first letters and those of the past few weeks, but these differences may not be as significant as I think, and the reason for them may not be the one I thought I had detected. Your behavior toward me may also have a reason other than the one I am able to recognize, or rather not may, but has, since you say so yourself. That's the way it is, I make you suffer and yet, as you say, you are quite satisfied with me, and you make me suffer and yet I want you to be exactly as you are and not a shade different. For example, remember that letter you wrote to me from the zoological gardens. That wasn't a letter, that was a ghost of a letter. I know it almost by heart. "We are all here, sitting in the restaurant at the zoo, after spending the entire afternoon sitting in the zoo." But why on earth, why did you have to sit in the zoo? After all, you are not a slave. You might have had a rest at home after your journey, and

sent me 5 peaceful lines. “I am now writing under the table, while discussing traveling plans for next summer.” So these lines, the first after an interval of a week, you have to write in unimaginable circumstances, which moreover almost imply a reproach to me for wanting to hear from you after a whole week. And then you mail the letter without a stamp, so that it takes 3 days longer, and think you needn’t bother to write again for another 3 days.—Now I wanted to say something loving; deep within me is nothing but love for you, yet bitterness still obtrudes. If only it were tears, and we were in each other’s arms!

Franz

[June 2, 1913]

Löwy is sitting behind me, reading. No, Felice, it is not that I didn’t write to you because he took up too much of my time, what could take up my time to the extent of banishing all thought of you? But I was waiting for your letter. How I wish I could swear to you that we’ll write to each other calmly from now on, without allowing anything to upset us, but I cannot vouch for myself. And now, dearest, suppose—though it may not be a certainty—suppose it is not just the distance that makes me what I am, but that I am the same, and permanently so, also at close quarters, only rather more desperate on the one hand, and rather more weary on the other. And as I ponder all this, my thoughts return constantly to my letter to your father.

Dearest Felice, please write and tell me about yourself, as in the old days, about the office, about your friends, your family, your walks, about books; you have no idea how important it is to my life.

Can you discover any meaning in the “Judgment”—some straightforward, coherent meaning that one could follow? I can’t find any, nor can I explain anything in it. But there are a number of strange things about it. Just look at the names! It was written at a time when I had not yet written to you,[97] though I had met you and the world had grown in value owing to your existence. Now note

this. Georg has the same number of letters as Franz, “Bendemann” is made up of Bende and Mann, Bende has the same number of letters as Kafka, and the two vowels are also in the same place; out of pity for poor “Bende,” “Mann” is probably meant to fortify him for his struggles. “Frieda” has the same number of letters as Felice; it also starts with the same letter; “Friede” and “Glück” are also closely related; “Brandenfeld,” owing to “feld,” has some connection with “Bauer,” and also starts with the same letter.[98] And there are other similar things—all of which, needless to say, I only discovered afterwards. The whole thing, incidentally, was written during a single night, from 11 to 6 in the morning. When I sat down to write, after a Sunday so miserable I could have screamed (I had spent the entire afternoon silently circling around my brother-in-law’s relatives, who were on their first visit to us), I meant to describe a war; from his window a young man was to see a vast crowd advancing across the bridge, but then the whole thing turned in my hands into something else.— And one more thing: The final word in the penultimate sentence should read “drop,” not “fall.”[99] And now, is all well again?

Franz

June [6 and] 7, 1913

Well, Felice, just look how sad this is. On Monday you wrote that from now on you intend to write every day again. I got that letter on Tuesday; by Wednesday you had my answer. It is now Friday evening and I still haven’t had a line. Have I not reason to regret that you intend to write “not out of compassion” but for some other reason, for if you wrote out of compassion, I should have had the letter long ago. Again and again you make promises you are unable to keep. This is surely not like you.

Franz

[The next day, June 7, 1913]

On leaving home this morning I left the letter behind (I have to rush off in a hurry nowadays because my parents are in Franzensbad and I have to go to the shop in the morning as well as in the afternoon, and now Ottla has gone to bed with a sore throat—but why am I telling you this? To try and influence you even in this way? No, that's not the reason; the less so, since I know it would be useless). Then again I was glad I hadn't mailed it this morning, for something was sure to arrive today. Nothing came. I am telling you this as though you didn't know. But you do know, and intend it to be so. I no longer even consider the possibility of a letter having gone astray. Letters that have been written do not go astray, the only letters that go astray are those that have never been written. But why? Why? Why torment me so unnecessarily?

June 7, 1913

Now at 11:30 P.M. I have come back from an excursion, and there is the letter I have been expecting, or rather no longer expecting. So one of your letters has really gone astray, and here I have been tormenting myself for weeks owing to its nonarrival. And what kind of ghosts have appeared to you in the meantime to unseal your lips? Yes, I shall write more fully about this tomorrow; meanwhile I must be happy that these lips, which in truth, today and always, I dare and can kiss only from afar, have still got some kind words for me. And now goodnight. Your doubts do not mean a retreat, or do they? How glad I am that you talk at all, even if you fail to mention what in fact, unbeknown to you, most occupies your mind. But the opening words are spoken, and with them we must conjure up the others, so as to become entirely free to make the right decision. And now to sleep. No, I still am unable to sleep, more and more so. But maybe today.

Franz

What was in the lost letter? And address the letters with greater care!

Some day I should like to send your sister Erna my regards; will you let me have her address.

June 10, 1913

You are ill, and yet still running about? Better if you didn't go to the doctor but stayed at home and rested. I wish I could look after you.

In any case, we both need a rest; what would be more natural than that we, who both have the same need, should go to the same place?

You shouldn't ask whether I love you. Sometimes I feel as though everything, everything were deserted, and you alone were sitting on the ruins of Berlin.

I must admit your letter of Friday is not yet answered, but in answer to it I am preparing a treatise which is not yet ready. Not actually from lack of time, but from weakness and an unsteadiness of the head which has been refusing to obey for a long time.

By a coincidence the notice about Löwy is lying in front of me, and here it is.[100] The recital went off rather badly, but at least Löwy has a little money now, there is no other way of helping him at present. I should like to let you listen to him talking. He is better at that than at any reading, reciting, or singing; at such moments his fire is infectious.

The "Judgment" cannot be explained. Perhaps one day I'll show you some entries in my diary about it. The story is full of abstractions, though they are never admitted. The friend is hardly a real person, perhaps he is more whatever the father and Georg have in common. The story may be a journey around father and son, and the friend's changing shape may be a change in perspective in the relationship between father and son. But I am not quite sure of this, either.

Today I am sending you the *Stoker*. Receive the little lad kindly, sit him down beside you and praise him, as he longs for you to do.

Tomorrow I expect an accurate report about the silly things the doctor said. By the way, who is he? Your family doctor? What's his name?

Look, I don't want this letter to prevent you from coming to Prague. Come, just come! You are so eagerly expected.

Franz

June 13, 1913

Such is my indecision I can barely move my hand to write. Your letters once again at a standstill, as indeed they have been continually for months. Just as for months past my letters have been an appeal for news, as though you were a complete stranger who cannot possibly imagine the sufferings of someone waiting for news. And this standstill was always your doing, though perhaps not your fault. And here it is again. Could you be ill, as you implied before? Even that, I couldn't consider seriously now. I remember how once in the early days I sent a telegram to your home asking, "Are you ill?"—by which I merely made a fool of myself. And how the other day I waited 2 hours for a telephone connection, and meanwhile, in the miserable waiting room of some miserable post office, composed a letter by which I meant to touch your mother's heart and force her to give me some news about your state of health—and how finally I heard your strong clear voice, and your innocent question: "How are you?" All morning I have been thinking of sending a telegram to Fräulein Brühl, and yet probably won't do so.

Please, please Felice, if you are well, do write a line. But of course if you are ill—which after all is possible; I gave up trusting my intuitive powers long ago—then what? Indeed I don't know. Then I shall be left with my anxiety and my fears, for how could I hope to achieve anything with my wishes, since I cannot do so with my deeds? But even then I might get some news, perhaps through your sister. But who am I talking to? Perhaps you won't even get this letter, and I may as well leave it here on my desk.

Franz

That was the Sunday letter I had prepared for you. It was the best I could do. Now your express letter, written on Wednesday and mailed on Friday evening, has just been delivered to me in bed. I am almost satisfied, I forget unpleasantness too easily. What struck me most was the story about the collecting of material and the occasional poet. Terrible on the one hand, but on the other, oddly enough, relating to an entirely alien race. What strange customs!

[June 15, 1913]

Dear Felice, I find it difficult to write today, not because it is late, but because the letter that will arrive tomorrow—will it in fact arrive?—was extracted by force; I forced it from you with my telegram. Your guardian angel kept you from writing, even on that endless Sunday, and I wrestled with your guardian angel. A shameful victory—if, in fact, it is one. What do I want from you? What makes me persecute you? Why don't I desist, or heed the signs? On the pretext of wanting to free you of me, I force myself upon you. Is there no limit, no way out? The moment I am forced to believe that you are lost to me, a simple optical illusion occurs at once, and the somehow-somewhere-existing, minute, barely visible, never-to-be-discovered way out takes on proportions of wondrous size and beauty, and once again I plunge into pursuit, and promptly stop short again. And I experience not only my own suffering, but even more that which I inflict upon you.

Franz

June [10 to] 16, 1913[101]

Dearest Felice, I have just had a few words with my sister, who is in bed, and with the governess, who is with her. My sister is good and kind, the governess the most devoted of creatures, and yet my few words were uttered with extreme irritation, and all I longed for was to get out of the room where they were trying to detain me with questions. Neither my sister nor the governess gave me the slightest

cause for irritation, nor was there any opportunity of showing my irritation, and so, in this abominable frame of mind, I was forced to retreat to try and find some kind of purification by writing to you. But even of this I am uncertain, for there was no letter from you today, and unless I can cling to a recent word of yours, I feel I am in a void.

Well, now your father is back again, and the letter still remains unwritten; but then your last letter is possibly the first in a long time in which you ask me to be “frank and honest,” and yourself discard all self-consciousness and taciturnity.

By now you must realize my peculiar position. What comes between you and me is, above all, the doctor. What he will have to say is doubtful, the medical diagnosis is not the most decisive factor in these decisions; if it were, it wouldn’t be worth obtaining. As I said, I have not actually been ill, and yet I am. It is possible that different circumstances might make me well, but it is impossible for these different circumstances to be created. The medical decision (which I can say at once won’t necessarily be decisive for me) will depend solely on the unknown doctor’s character. My family doctor, for instance, with his stupid irresponsibility, wouldn’t see the slightest objection, on the contrary. Another and better doctor might throw up his hands in dismay.

Now consider, Felice, in view of this uncertainty, it is difficult to say the word, and indeed it is bound to sound rather strange. Clearly, it’s too soon to say it. But afterwards, it would be too late: there wouldn’t be any time to discuss matters of the kind you mentioned in your last letter. But there also isn’t time for endless hesitations, at least this is what I feel about it, and so I ask: In view of the above—alas, irremediable—conditions, will you consider whether you wish to be my wife? Will you do that?

I stopped at this point a few days ago, and have not resumed since. I can well understand why I was unable to. Because, fundamentally, this is a criminal question I am putting to you (your letter of today confirms this), but in the conflict of forces, those that have to pose this question are victorious.

What you say about being equals, etc.—*provided it is not a cover* (*needless to say an unconscious one*) *for other things*—is pure fantasy. I am nothing, absolutely nothing. I am "further ahead in every way" than you? Some capacity for understanding people, and for putting myself in their place—this I have, but I don't believe I have ever met a single person who in the long run in his ordinary human relationships, in normal everyday life (and what else is it all about?), could be more hopeless than I. I have no memory, either for things learned or things read, either for things experienced or things heard, either for people or events; I feel as though I had experienced nothing, learned nothing, and in fact I know less about most things than the average schoolboy; and what I know, I know so superficially that even the second question is beyond me. I am unable to reason, my reasoning constantly comes up against a blank wall; certain isolated matters I can grasp in a flash, but I am quite incapable of coherent, consecutive reasoning. Nor can I tell a story properly; in fact I can hardly even talk; when I am telling a story I usually have the kind of feeling small children probably experience when attempting their first steps—not, however, because they themselves feel the need to walk, but because the grownups, who can walk perfectly, expect them to. And you, Felice, don't feel equal to such a man, you who are gay, lively, sure of yourself, and healthy? All I possess are certain powers which, at a depth almost inaccessible under normal conditions, shape themselves into literature, powers to which, however, in my present professional as well as physical state, I dare not commit myself, because for every inner exhortation of these powers there are as many, if not more, inner warnings. Could I but commit myself to them they would undoubtedly, of this I am convinced, lift me out of my inner misery in an instant.

Apropos the theoretical aspect of equality—for in practice, as I said, it doesn't arise, not at any rate in your sense—I only want to add that the degree of similarity in education, knowledge, higher aspirations, and ideals, which you seem to demand as prerequisites to a happy marriage, is in my opinion almost impossible, secondly unimportant, and thirdly not even advantageous or desirable. What

is essential to marriage is personal harmony, a harmony far deeper than that of opinions, a harmony that cannot be analyzed but only felt—i.e., the necessity for personal proximity. But this doesn't mean that the freedom of either party is in any way endangered; it is endangered only by unnecessary human proximity which constitutes the greatest part of our lives.

You say it is conceivable that I might not be able to stand life with you. Here you almost touch on the truth, but from an angle totally different from the one you have in mind. I really do believe I am lost to all social intercourse. I am quite incapable of conducting a prolonged, vigorously developed conversation with any individual, except in certain exceptional, appallingly exceptional cases. For example, during the long years we have known each other I have, after all, been alone with Max on many occasions, for days on end, when traveling even for weeks on end and almost continuously, yet I do not remember—and had it happened, I would certainly remember—ever having had a long coherent conversation involving my entire being, as should inevitably follow when two people with a great fund of independent and lively ideas and experiences are thrown together. And monologues from Max (and many others) I have heard in plenty, but what they lacked was the vociferous, and as a rule even the silent, conversational partner.

(Dearest, it's getting late, this letter won't get mailed; that's bad, and what's worse is that it hasn't been written in one go, but paragraph by paragraph, not really from lack of time, but owing to restiveness and self-torture.) I am at my most bearable in familiar surroundings with 2 or 3 friends; then I am free, am not forced to be continually attentive and cooperative, but can take part in what's going on if and when I feel like it, as much or as little as I wish; no one misses me, no one is made uneasy by my presence. If there is a stranger present who happens to get under my skin, all the better, for then, on borrowed strength, I seem to be able to become quite animated. But if I am in an unfamiliar place, among a number of strange people, or people whom I feel to be strangers, then the whole room presses on my chest and I am unable to move, my whole personality seems virtually to get under their skins, and

everything becomes hopeless. This was what happened that afternoon at your house,[102] and the night before last at Weltsch's uncle's, among people who, quite incomprehensibly, show real fondness for me. I remember so well, I was leaning against a table, the daughter of the house leaned beside me—there isn't a girl in Prague I like better—yet in the presence of these good friends I was incapable of uttering a single sensible word. I stood and stared, and every now and again came out with something nonsensical. Had I been tied to the table I couldn't have looked more tormented and affected. A good deal more could be said about all that, but this is enough for the present.

Accordingly one might think I had been born to solitude—afterwards, when I found myself alone in my room, I was in despair about everything, yet at the same time relatively happy, and decided not to see my dear friend Felix for at least another week, not by any means from a sense of shame, rather from sheer *weariness*—but then I can't even cope with myself, except when I am writing. True, if I behaved toward myself the way I behave toward others, I should have gone to pieces long ago, though I have been close to it many a time.

Now consider, Felice, the change that marriage would bring about for us, what each would lose and each would gain. I should lose my (for the most part) terrible loneliness, and you, whom I love above all others, would be my gain. Whereas you would lose the life you have lived hitherto, with which you were almost completely satisfied. You would lose Berlin, the office you enjoy, your girl friends, the small pleasures of life, the prospect of marrying a decent, cheerful, healthy man, of having beautiful, healthy children for whom, if you think about it, you clearly long. In place of these incalculable losses, you would gain a sick, weak, unsociable, taciturn, gloomy, stiff, almost hopeless man who possibly has but one virtue, which is that he loves you. Instead of sacrificing yourself for real children, which would be in accordance with your nature as a healthy girl, you would have to sacrifice yourself for this man who is childish, but childish in the worst sense, and who at best might learn from you, letter by letter, the ways of human speech. And you

would lose in all the small things, all of them. My income may not be more than yours; I have precisely 4,588 kronen a year, am however entitled to a pension, but my income, as in any employment similar to the civil service, can increase only very slightly; from my parents I have no great expectations, from literature none. So you would have to live far more modestly than you do now. Would you really do this and stand it for my sake, for the sake of the man described above?

And now, Felice, you speak. Think over everything I have said in all my letters from the beginning. I don't believe the statements about myself could ever have varied a great deal. Hardly anything would have been exaggerated, too little may have been said about some things. You need say nothing about the external account, this is plain enough, and strictly prohibits a "Yes." What remains is only the internal account. How does it stand? Will you reply in great detail? Or not in great detail if you haven't much time, but clearly, as befits your basically clear nature, only slightly muddied by me.

Franz

June 17, 1913

Dearest Felice, did my heavy letter reach you? I was very careless with it. I left the shop fairly late in the evening (my parents are not coming back till next week, Ottla recovered long ago, the food is the same as usual, and I as indifferent to it as ever), and as I still wanted to mail the letter I had to go to the station. But I was stopped by a friend (he noticed the letter in my hand, asked what it was, and I said jokingly, and indeed this was how he took it, that it was a proposal of marriage; one really can't say anything more unbelievable), but then, if the letter was to catch the mail, I had to go on to the platform. But when I tried to get a ticket[103] from a dispenser, the coin fell out again, for the machine was empty. I was about to try another one when out of the dark, empty first-class waiting room appeared an old man with a big white moustache, possibly but not necessarily a railway employee—I hardly looked at

him and certainly would not recognize him again—and offered to mail my letter, and, without really waiting for me to agree, took it and the coin; in my embarrassment, my most frequent state, I left everything to him. “Can I really rely on you?” I added, half-asleep, but man and letter had disappeared.

I was happy today with your letter and your postcard (everything arrives late at the apartment, I didn’t receive the postcard until noon). So you think I have turned into an erratic letter writer? But surely not on my own? No, not that, not in relation to you. But perhaps you think there are altogether better means of communication than letters. If so, you may be right, though not necessarily. But what did you mean the other day when you said that my letters too had changed? In what way? I do want to know. Unless you mean from the time I was doing my own writing and was a different person.

I don’t quite understand your vacation plans. Do you really have to go in August? I can only get away in September. And why are the short journeys you have in mind quite so expensive? Are you unable to travel cheaply? You have frightened me at times. The money your hotel in Prague cost, for instance! And the enormous sum you mentioned as necessary for Palestine! Can’t you travel 3rd class?[104] I, on the other hand, can’t travel any other way. After all, journeys are so cheap; they have to be, considering how essential they are. Which is why I advise you to go to Lake Garda, and there I would explain to you why.

Franz

June 19, 1913

I want to get married and am so weak that as a result of a little word on a postcard my knees begin to shake. Shall I get a letter tomorrow from which I can conclude that you have carefully considered everything point by point, have fully digested it, and yet say Yes; in other words that you have not denied everything (that would be unfortunate for, mark my words! it is undeniable) but

invalidated and surmounted it, or by virtue of some close reasoning at least are convinced that you are capable of surmounting it?

Franz

> When did you get my letter? Would you be so kind as to get me a copy of last Monday's issue of the Berlin paper *Deutsche Montagszeitung*. I am told there is something in it about the *Stoker*.[105]

[June 20, 1913]

Dear, dearest Felice, not that, not that. You should not submit to something that could be your undoing, rather—God willing—enter into it, consider it, perhaps. Look upon my present behavior as a vice which I may have overlooked when giving a description of myself; I can't shake it off. The word you say to me is outwardly the one to which I want to dedicate my life, yet from outside I cannot tell whether it is the very one I want. Meanwhile, Felice, I am keeping my hand over your mouth, and meanwhile the word has not in fact been spoken, but uttered into the hollow of my hand. You have not fully appreciated what I wrote (please, please, Felice, don't hold it against me for talking to you like this—I must, I must); I cannot see that you have considered it point by point, you have considered it only as a whole; who knows what you may have missed. However, you did have certain doubts, though I can see only their traces (since you let a day go by before writing the postcard, and 2 days before sending the letter); the doubts themselves are not recorded. What I said about the doctor makes you uneasy; you don't quite understand it, which is not surprising, but instead of asking questions, you say "let's leave it!" What I meant was that the doctor's decision, even supposing it were favorable, would not in itself automatically be my decision; more than this I did not say. You do admit there were nasty things in my letter, because "if I were apprehensive …" But dearest, dearest, it is not only courage I ask of you, or rather I do not wish to impose

upon you a task that requires only courage. *For courage without careful consideration is self-sacrifice.* You believe everything I say; only what I say about myself you call “too harsh.” In that case you don’t believe any part of my letter, for it is all about me. What am I to do? How make the incredible credible to you! You have already seen, heard, and put up with me in the flesh. Not only you but your family. And still you do not believe me. And it’s a question, too, of your losing more than just “Berlin and all that goes with it”; but of this you say nothing, yet it is the most important. “A good, kind husband”? I attached quite different adjectives to myself in my last letter, but you simply refuse to believe them. Do believe me; consider everything carefully and tell me *how* you have considered it. If only you had a little time today, Sunday, and could write and tell me in a little more detail how you visualize everyday life with a man such as the one described by me? Do that, Felice, I ask you, as one who has been pledged to you ever since the first quarter of an hour.

Franz

June 22, 1913

Dearest, you cannot imagine the way I squeeze life out of your letters, but the careful consideration, the fully conscious Yes is not in them as yet, not even in your last letter. If only it is in tomorrow’s letter, or more particularly in your reply to the one I shall send tomorrow. For tomorrow’s letter, which is almost finished, is so important to me that I’d rather not send it by ordinary mail today, but registered, tomorrow. Then a detailed reply to that letter, too, Felice! Then this probing, this very necessary probing, the necessity of which you are not quite prepared to accept, may be over for the time being. You surely don’t believe, Felice, that I take pleasure in tormenting you; all right, in that case measure the necessity by the fact that I do it nevertheless. Answer tomorrow’s letter most meticulously!

If Frl. Brühl hasn't touched it up, then palmistry is a fine art—and, particularly in the case of the prophecy about "never-going-to-be-rich," alas incontestable; but it also contains a grave error. And yet, I must admit that on the whole it sounds wonderful, not wonderfully accurate, but wonderfully pleasant. Do tell me more about it, won't you?

Well, you will get my letter on Tuesday. I should like to keep you forever at your desk, forever engaged in writing to me.

Franz

June 21, [22, and 23], 1913

Dearest, this too, and perhaps this above all, you do not take into account sufficiently in your considerations, though we have written a great deal about it: namely, that writing is actually the good part of my nature. If there is anything good about me, it is that. Without this world in my head, this world straining to be released, I would never have dared to think of wanting to win you. It is not so much a question of what you think of my writing now, but, should we live together, you would soon realize that if willingly or unwillingly you do not come to love my writing, there would be absolutely nothing for you to hold on to. In which case you would be terribly lonely, Felice; you would not realize how much I love you, and I should hardly be able to prove my love, even though then I might feel myself especially yours, then as now. I am slowly being pulverized between the office and my writing (this holds true even now, though I have written nothing for 5 months); if it weren't for the office, then of course everything would be different, and these warnings would not have to be so severe, but as things are I do have to keep myself in hand as best I can. But what, dearest Felice, have you to say to the kind of married life in which the husband, at any rate for several months in the year, returns from the office at 2:30 or 3, eats, lies down, sleeps until 7 or 8, hurriedly has his supper, takes an hour's walk, and then starts writing, and writes till 1 or 2? Could you really stand that? To know nothing about your husband except

that he is sitting in his room writing? And to spend the autumn and winter in this way? And by spring be ready to welcome the man, half-dead, at the door of his study, and through spring and summer watch him trying to recover in time for the autumn? Is that a possible sort of life? Maybe, maybe it is possible; nevertheless you must consider it carefully to the very last shadow of doubt. Nor should you forget other peculiarities connected with writing, but also due to my unfortunate disposition. For as long as I can remember it has made me feel awkward, or at least uneasy, to have a stranger or even a friend in my room; you, at any rate, like people, perhaps even parties, whereas I should have to make a great, an almost painful effort to force myself to receive relatives or even friends in my or—dare I use the word—our apartment. Nothing, for instance, would be easier for me than to live in Prague and never see any of my relatives, though they are quite the kindest people, above all in their kindness toward me, and every one of them has already shown me more undeserved generosity than ever I could show them. Thus my ambition would be to have an apartment, for the time being, as near as possible to the outskirts of the town, rather inaccessible; and my further ambition would be—later, by saving—to acquire a small house with a garden outside the town. But just think, Felice, you would then actually be in a position similar to that of your sister in Budapest for whom you feel so sorry, except that your position would be aggravated by me, nor would you have the one consolation your sister has. What have you to say to that? I need a very explicit answer to this, you must appreciate that, a very explicit answer.

I know, Felice, there is a simple way of settling these questions quickly and favorably—by not believing me, or at least not believing me as concerns the future, or at least not believing me entirely. I fear you are on the point of it. As a matter of fact nothing could be worse. In that case you would be committing the gravest of sins against yourself, Felice, hence also against me. It would mean ruin for us both. You have to believe what I say about myself; which is the self-knowledge of a man of 30 who for deep-seated reasons has several times been close to madness, thus reaching the limits of

his existence, and so can see all of himself and what can become of him within these limits.

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June 22

That was written on Saturday evening, it is now Sunday afternoon; I am to see Werfel and others, and have to meet my parents at the station at 5130. I slept for only a very short time[d] last night, my head is not right, I don't know whether I shall be able to write down everything properly the way I want to.

At any rate you will have to include in your considerations the fact that I am by no means secure in my position at the office; the states of despair I am in on account of my office work, on account of this dreadful impediment to my life, keep recurring and getting worse, because the strength to restore the balance is constantly diminished by the very impossibility of the task. Several times I have been almost on the point of giving notice, and what is not being achieved by a definite decision may well be achieved automatically by my incapacity to carry out my work, which at times has been tremendous and carefully noted by my superiors. But what then?

And even if and as long as I am there, thus at best, a relative best, my wife and I will be a poor couple who will have to apportion their 4,588 kronen with care. We shall be very much poorer than my sisters, for instance, who are comparatively well off. (I can expect nothing from my parents, at least in their lifetime.) We shall be poorer than either Max or Oskar. Won't that embarrass my wife and for this reason, for this reason alone, embarrass me too? Will she accept that? And should there be exceptional expenditures owing to illness or the like, we would be in debt at once. Will she accept that, too?

Several times in the past you have mentioned some sorrow that your family had to suffer and accept. What kind of sorrow was it? Might it serve as a test of endurance for other sorrows?

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June 23

Monday, no letter, contrary to all expectations.—A moment ago I followed my father into the next room, where little Felix had just woken up. My father would have been so offended if I had not accompanied him. But how nauseating it is to see the way he carries on with that child, and the fuss they all make of it! Yesterday afternoon when everyone foregathered here after my parents' return and, led by my father in a positive frenzy, the whole family, while playing with this child, lost themselves in the nethermost regions of sexuality, I felt as revolted as if I'd been condemned to live in a sty. Well aware as I am of my own exaggerated sensitivity in this respect, I am also fully conscious of the moral, extraordinary, and, from a distance, even beautiful aspect of the entire spectacle. But there of course, in the midst of it, sat my poor mother who has never had the time or ever learned how to keep her body in proper shape, and who is now bloated and bent from work and giving birth to 6 children; there, purple in the face, sat my father, whose complaint was not improved by the quiet life in Franzensbad; there sat my eldest sister who but two years ago was still a young girl, yet whose body, after producing a couple of children, is now really beginning, more from neglect and ignorance than from lack of time, to resemble that of my mother—and there she sat, her figure bulging out of some extraordinary corset. And on closer scrutiny, even my middle sister is showing signs of looking like the eldest.—Dearest, how I sought refuge with you! But you never even thought of me yesterday, and never answered my questions, though an answer is quite unavoidable. And I must have the answer, a very precise answer. Just as nothing you do will ever offend me, so must you never feel offended by me; but this is not all: you also mustn't remain silent out of sheer obstinacy (as you once told me you did about Werfel's book), there is really no time for this now; and finally, whatever happens, don't let yourself be swayed by any information you may have gathered from Max that time in Berlin. You must listen only to what I am saying now, Felice; you must reply to this alone, but you must answer it all, not just the questions. But provided you do, one way or the other, I promise in return that when writing to your parents asking for your hand, I will

make my letter very brief. It is really our own affair entirely, but it is you who have to come to terms with it.

Franz

June 26, 1913

Dearest Felice, when I had read your letter today, needless to say not just once, our situation seemed to me so terrible that I immediately glanced across the desk and suggested to my colleague, that absurd and charming man I have undoubtedly mentioned before, that we should say "*Du*" to each other. For he is involved in a love affair which at the moment is unhappy and in its absurdity typical of him, but which is sure to turn out well in the end. And so he is always moaning; not only do I have to comfort him, I also have to help him; and so in this to and fro of joy and misery caused by your letter, in a moment of utter helplessness and without taking or wanting to take him further into my confidence (incidentally, he is immensely devoted and loyal), I offered him my hand and proposed the "*Du.*" It was an exaggerated gesture and I soon regretted it.

I am not in the right frame of mind today, Felice, for answering your letter properly; my head aches; I have a lot to say to you and am unable to summarize it. You do not reply to all my questions, but your answer is sweet, and as comprehensive as is possible for you at the moment; more I cannot ask. Besides, some progress has been made, due to the fact that through these letters the issue becomes clearer, and above all more defined.

I have not written to you now for 2 days, first of all because I wanted to give you time and leisure to think, and secondly because Monday's letter-card made me unhappy, by its contents as well as by the fact that in it you promised to write again that evening, though I knew in advance that you wouldn't, and in fact you didn't, though you have promised many times in the past to make definite promises only for definite certainties.

As far as I can see in my present stupid state, the accomplishment of our mutual happiness depends on the realization of the few "ifs"

in your letter. Yet how is this to be established? It is by no means certain that our being together even for some length of time would be enough to establish it. Moreover, the possibility of our being together for any length of time doesn't even exist. Times and places of our vacations do not coincide, nor is Berlin the right place for this being together. And a brief meeting would be to no avail for this purpose. Actually, neither a short nor a long time is enough. For this is a question entirely of faith, courage, and confidence on your part. Faith because, believe me, Felice, your assumptions are incorrect. My attitude to my writing and my attitude to people is unchangeable; it is a part of my nature, and not due to temporary circumstances. What I need for my writing is seclusion, not "like a hermit," that would not be enough, but like the dead. Writing, in this sense, is a sleep deeper than that of death, and just as one would not and cannot tear the dead from their graves, so I must not and cannot be torn from my desk at night. This has no immediate bearing on my relationship with people; it is simply that I can write only in this regular, continuous, and rigorous fashion, and therefore can live only in this way too. But as you say, for you it will be "rather difficult." I have always had this fear of people, not actually of the people themselves, but of their intrusion upon my weak nature; for even the most intimate friend to set foot in my room fills me with terror, and is more than just a symbol of this fear. But leaving this aside, although it cannot be left aside, how, during that autumn and winter life I described, can people (let alone mother and father) possibly come to see us without having an intolerably disturbing influence on me—and, if she feels for me, also on my wife? "But whether you are capable of living in such seclusion, you do not know." "Whether I could replace all others for you, you do not know." Is this an answer, is it a question?

The office? That one day I shall be in a position to leave it is quite out of the question. But that I shall one day be forced to leave it, on account of being unfit to carry on, that is by no means out of the question. In this respect my feeling of inner insecurity and anxiety is terrible, and here again the only and actual reason for it is my writing. My worries about you and me are the worries of life, are

part of the fabric of life, and for this reason would ultimately be compatible with my work at the office, but writing and office cannot be reconciled, since writing has its center of gravity in depth, whereas the office is on the surface of life. So it goes up and down, and one is bound to be torn asunder in the process.

The one thing your letter may finally have eliminated is my misgivings about the shortage of money. This alone would be something. But have you really considered it carefully?

So time is frittered away with questions. I don't remember having written that "it is very urgent" but that's what I meant to say.

Franz

[IN THE LEFT-HAND MARGIN ON THE LAST PAGE] The *Montagszeitung*? If there is nothing in it about the *Stoker* of course I don't need it.

June 27, 1913

I am so miserable, there are so many questions, I can see no way out and am so wretched and feeble that I could lie forever on the sofa and keep opening and closing my eyes without knowing the difference. I can neither eat nor sleep; every day at the office there is exasperation and disapproval, and I am invariably to blame; between us, or rather not so much between us as ahead of us, things are so unsettled, and as I look out of the window—this is trivial, yet pertinent, for I can feel the fury rising in my throat—I can see, just opposite, outside the swimming baths, a strange youth rowing around in my boat. (As a matter of fact this is something I have seen almost every day for the past 3 weeks, since I cannot get myself to replace the missing chain.)

At this particular moment, with the squabbles at the office, which are all my fault and which, in spite of every possible kindness from all sides, are bound to recur at regular intervals and do recur, because I am incapable of tidiness (I lose files even if I clutch them in both hands) or of dealing with a case for which I happen to feel a particular distaste, even if for years I have to bear the menace that

emanates from it; nor can I conceal, prevent, or justify anything, instead I have to let everything descend upon me, the way the earth accepts a thunderstorm—at this particular moment (as I was saying), with my obvious inability to carry on in my present, let alone some future even more responsible job, I feel bound to ask myself above all whether, if only in this respect, I have the right to claim you, even if you had the courage to give yourself to me.

But your conduct, does it actually give me the right to anything? No, I must find this right within myself. In fact, what I should really have to say to myself is that I can derive a right to you, to my happiness, entirely from my own assessment of my physical and mental condition, my confidence within and without, my financial situation, and my future. Should my own assessment deny me this right—which it does—where would I acquire a second right? Certainly not from your courage, your goodness, nor even from your love, even if it isn't just imaginary (*a possibility which you left open in your last letter*). This right I could not claim—it would be almost on the borderline between a right and a duty—unless you were to say: "In spite of everything, I cannot do otherwise." But by all indications you neither can nor should say it. Least of all after you have given everything your careful consideration. Writing does make things clearer, yet at the same time worse.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN OF THE FIRST PAGE] Thank you for the newspaper. One is tickled from head to foot.—I won't be able to write for Sunday except by express letter.

June 28, 1913

No letter yesterday, none today. This time I can almost understand it. My letters are becoming intolerable, like my talking and not talking in Nikolassee.[106] What's more, I am beginning to lose my sense of perspective, and could be fully occupied attending to the

throbbing and aching in my temples; for everything else I am useless. At the office it was even worse than yesterday.

Yesterday afternoon, toward evening, after 6 o'clock, I sat on the sofa gazing at the room with a vacant stare. My sister, having just returned from the shop, opened my door and stood there. Somehow or other she has felt sorry for me lately, is aware that I have been eating practically nothing, and now wanted to know if I was going to have any supper. But feeling no desire to talk, I just turned and stared at her, she stared back, and this went on for quite a while. All I wondered was how it would be if instead of my sister my wife were standing in the door faced with this sight, and compelled to put up with it.

At lunchtime today my mother said: "I know you are worried. I don't want to pry into your secrets, but I would so like you to be contented, etc." And later at some utterly inappropriate moment: "You have no idea how much your father cares for you, etc." I said all I could say: "But I have no worries, only troubles at the office." That was the end of it, but I know that whenever she can, she starts talking to my sister about you and me. When dealing with me, her helplessness is almost as great as my own.

But I won't go on, I don't want to spoil your Sunday by writing more, as would be inevitable. I can think of nothing but sad things. I would like to explain this by the fact that I have had no letter from you today; but it isn't only that. At least be kind to this piece of paper, Felice (how the F pushed itself into my pen); fondle it for a moment; the thought of it will make me feel better.

Franz

June 29, 1913

Nothing? You had letters from me on both Friday and Saturday, yet you don't write a single word? It was my turn to be on duty at the office today, Sunday. I got home a moment ago (my family are in the country); while opening the door my heart beat not as though I were about to find the expected, the confidently expected letter, but

as though I were about to meet the dearest human being in the flesh —and there is nothing. This must have some significance, I tell myself, and it isn't difficult to work it out.

Franz

July 1, 1913

My dearest Felice, you are right, my mother has just handed me the information. It is an elaborate document, as gruesome as it is intensely funny. We shall laugh about it one day. I knew my mother had procured it, for on the evening of the day your last telegram arrived I let my mother read the letter I had prepared for your father. Now she thought there was no time to be lost and, without consulting me, sent for the information, undoubtedly with the proviso that you were not to know anything about it. Next day she admitted it to me; I didn't take it very seriously and thought no more about it. Now it has arrived; it reads as though written by someone who is in love with you. Yet not a word of it is true. Nothing but stock answers. True answers are probably unobtainable anyway, even if the agency were actually capable of discovering the truth. Nevertheless it reassures my parents a thousand times more than anything I say.—Imagine, the informant even tells barefaced lies—to your advantage, as he seems to think. What do you think "one hears particularly" about you? "One hears particularly that you are an able cook." Well, I never! Needless to say, he is quite unaware that this would be no good to you in our household, or at least that you would have to relearn everything. I don't know, but I do think—I was interrupted and have only got another moment—I do think our diet will be a vegetarian one, or don't you? You dear cook, about whose culinary cleverness "one hears particularly."

I feel rotten; I shall fall apart, unless they can put me together again down south. I can't come to Westerland,[107] my chief is on vacation, and even if I had a vacation, I doubt that I would come; my entire vacation has to be devoted to regaining a little strength, if only for your sake.—What is your idea about the sequence of events:

my letter to your father, followed by my father's visit? Or shall we leave my father out altogether? You have plenty of time to think about it. And try to recover from me, but not completely.

Franz

July 3, 1913

[Kafka's 30th birthday]

I wrote and told you everything, Felice, that came into my mind at the time of writing. It is not everything, yet with some perception one can sense almost everything. And still you are prepared to risk it; either you are absurdly bold, or else have intimations of whatever holds sway over us that I lack. I no longer doubt that you believe me, although you are slightly evasive even in today's letter (letters don't allow one to keep a sufficient hold of each other without becoming crude). I don't doubt that you believe me, for if I did you would not be the one I love, and nothing would be free of doubt. No, from now on then, we shall hold on to each other and join hands properly. Do you still remember my long bony hand with fingers like those of a child and an ape? And you join yours to that.

I'm not saying that I am happy; I have too much anxiety and too many worries; anyway I may be quite incapable of human happiness, and the phenomenon that (your telegram has just arrived, I keep staring at it as if it were a face, the only face I know and want among all human kind) that you, with whom I felt a bond from the first evening, that you and I should now be completely united, is really inconceivable; it makes me want to lean against your breast with eyes closed.

You have showered me with gifts. The fortitude with which I have endured these 30 years deserves the gifts, but the result of these efforts, my existence, really does not deserve them, as you will discover, Felice. Unless today happens to be a great birthday, and life, without losing what has been gained, is taking at this hour a special turn around its axis.

At lunch today, in response to her birthday wishes, I told my mother (very briefly, she is never at home for long and has always finished her meal by the time I arrive; my father went to the country this morning) that I am engaged. She wasn't very surprised, and took it with remarkable calm. She had no objections, asked but one request, and said my father was undoubtedly in agreement with her about the former as well as the latter. Her request was that I should permit her to make inquiries about your family: until the information arrived I would still be free to act according to my will; they neither would nor could prevent me, but in any case I should delay my letter to your parents until then. To which I replied that we were in fact already engaged, and that in any case my letter to your parents would not be a further step. My mother insisted. I don't know exactly why, perhaps from my permanent feeling of guilt toward my parents, but I gave in and handed my mother your father's name in writing. It seemed slightly ridiculous to think that should your parents have similar ideas, they would collect nothing but favorable information about us, and that no information agency would be capable of telling the truth about me. By the way, does your father know the "Judgment"? If not, please give it to him to read.

I cannot get over your courage! Am I not a stranger, don't my letters make me even more of a stranger? Don't my relatives look strange to you? These are my parents on the picture postcard; don't they look incredibly like all other strangers, except that the strangeness may be diminished by the fact that we are all Jews? And so you are not afraid (I don't think I shall ever get over my amazement) of this man who, by being afraid of everything himself, becomes even more terrible? Aren't you afraid of anything? Do you give yourself without hesitation? It's a miracle, there is nothing that can humanly be said about it, one simply has to thank God for it.

Franz

By the way, Felice, we have just managed to avoid our first quarrel. You invited someone to the place where no one is

allowed to be? (This is meant to be more serious than it sounds.) But actually Frl. Brühl is an exception, she can be invited, but she is the only one. I like her, pat her cheek gently for me.

July [5] 6, 1913

Oh dear, I shall certainly have to hurry if this letter is to arrive tomorrow. It is now Saturday, a quarter past six.

There was no letter today, hence no answer to my letter of yesterday. Didn't you take it the way it was meant? Do you think I was wrong to give my mother permission? Was it wrong of me to write and tell you? I gave in to my mother not only from a sense of guilt, as I said before, but owing to my general, and where my mother is concerned, especially pronounced, dialectic incompetence, and, above all, owing to general weakness. The fact that I saw how deeply she worries about me was yet another reason, if by no means the decisive one. But it seemed perfectly natural that I should write and tell you about it once it was done, for surely we want—and in our life together there will always be plenty of opportunity—to be frank with each other to the utmost limit, to the full extent of our relationship. Would you wish me to start off by withholding this trivial matter? And in that sense it is a trivial matter. It is not I who inquire about your family, to me your family is and always will be—which I dread for your sake, and have said so before—more remote than you will probably wish them to be. So how could I possibly be deeply concerned about your family now? And if we wish to make a life together we can be concerned with only the deepest feelings. Each of us will have to find within himself his own direction and his own decision. My parents, as well as yours, are forced to fall back upon outward appearances, for basically they are outside the matters that concern us. They know nothing except what they hear through the agency; we know more, or imagine we know more, and in any case what we know is different and more important—so the agency doesn't concern us in any way, it is the concern of our parents, something one can allow them to amuse themselves with,

something to keep them occupied. We are not affected by it, at least so I thought, but then I didn't get an answer.

Yesterday evening I wandered around the district where, if my dreams come true, you and I ought to live together. They have started to build, but there are still some gypsies on part of the land. I walked around for a long time examining everything. Eventually it will be lovely there; it's fairly high, a long way out of town, and yesterday after the rain the air was unusually clean. What's more, I felt very well there yesterday, not in the least as I do now. This is how my moods play with me incessantly.

Franz

July 6, 1913

You are cross with me, Felice? Listen, I do feel guilty, but not because I did it, nor because I told you about it, but because I may have hurt you. I could easily make excuses for everything, have in fact already done so to some extent; besides, I have above all this sleepless brain of mine as my best excuse (I don't know what this sleeplessness will lead to in the end, but a permanent unendurable state of this kind is bound to point at something); but please, Felice, don't listen to excuses, simply accept it and forgive without excuses, just as I regret it without guilt.

Well, I had no letter today, and last night I was almost physically near you in my misery. We—Max, his wife, his brother-in-law, Felix, and I—went to a cabaret to which my wife would not be allowed to go. Generally speaking, I appreciate this kind of thing, I believe I have a deep, an immensely deep understanding for it and enjoy it with my pulse racing, but yesterday, except for the dancing and singing of one Negro girl, it meant nothing to me.

To get back to it. Please think again, Felice! We really mustn't allow ourselves to be at loggerheads just now, when we are about to come together.

Franz

June [July] 7, 1913

You see, Felice, you have already begun to suffer at my hands; it has started and God knows where it will end. And your grief, I can see it quite clearly, is more specific, more unpleasant, more extensive than any suffering I have so far inflicted upon you. The question of whether I am to blame need not be considered at all, and even the occasion might almost be ignored. What matters is that you have suffered a great injustice, and this alone has to be considered—i.e., my attitude toward it and what the whole thing signifies.

It is entirely immaterial whether my mother is right or wrong. She is right, unquestionably, and more so than you imagine. She knows practically nothing about you, other than what was in the letter you once wrote to her. Apart from this she has merely heard from me that I wish to marry you. That is all she knows, since not a word can be got out of me. I am unable to talk to anyone, least of all my parents. It seems as though the very sight of those I sprang from fills me with dismay. Yesterday by chance all of us—my parents, my sister, and I—were obliged to walk for about an hour in the dark along a muddy road. Needless to say, in spite of all her efforts, my mother walked in so clumsy a fashion that she got her shoes, and undoubtedly her stockings and skirts as well, covered in dirt. Yet she was firmly convinced she might have been in a far worse mess, and on reaching home asked me (in fun, of course) to acknowledge this fact by inspecting her shoes—to testify that they were really not so very dirty. But believe me, I was quite incapable of looking down at them, because I was repelled, and not, as you might think, by the dirt. By then, however, as during the whole of the previous afternoon, I had come to feel some little affection, or rather admiration, for my father for being able to put up with all this—with my mother and me, my sisters with their families in the country, and the confusion in their summer home where cotton wool is to be found lying among the plates and a disgusting assortment of all kinds of objects on the beds; where one of my sisters, the middle one, is lying in bed with some slight throat infection, while her husband sits beside her and in fun as well as in

earnest keeps calling her “My Precious” and “My All”; where the little boy, because he can’t help himself while being played with, does his business on the floor in the middle of the room, where the two maids jostle each other in the performance of various duties, where my mother insists on waiting on everyone, where bread is spread with goose-drippings which, if one’s lucky, trickle only down one’s fingers. I do supply information, don’t I? Yet I am really getting it all wrong when I seek an explanation for my inability to put up with all this in the circumstances rather than within myself. Everything is a thousand times less unbearable than I have described here or before, but my repugnance when faced with it all is a thousand times greater than I could ever describe. It is not because they are relatives that I cannot bear to be in the same room with them, but merely because they are people; and I am going out there on Sunday afternoon, though fortunately I am under no obligation, for the sole purpose of proving it once again. Yesterday I was so choked with loathing that I groped for the door almost as if it were dark, and I was far from the house and out on the road before I felt better; but I had stored up so much of it that I still haven’t rid myself of it, even today. I cannot live with people; I absolutely hate all my relatives, not because they are my relatives, not because they are wicked, not because I don’t think well of them (which by no means diminishes my “terrible timidity,” as you suggest), but simply because they are the people with whom I live in close proximity. It is just that I cannot abide communal life; what’s more, I hardly have the energy to regard it as a misfortune. Seen in a detached way, I enjoy all people, but my enjoyment is not so great that, given the necessary physical requirements, I would not be incomparably happier living in a desert, in a forest, on an island, rather than here in my room between my parents’ bedroom and living room.

It certainly was not my intention to make you suffer, yet I have done so; obviously it never will be my intention to make you suffer, yet I shall always do so. (The business about the inquiries is of no importance at the moment; my mother did nothing about it on Friday because she wanted to discuss it with my father; there was

no letter from you on Saturday, and with my sense of guilt toward you, I asked my mother to wait, since on Sunday there was again no letter from you; that afternoon I withdrew the permission I had given my mother.) Felice, beware of thinking of life as commonplace, if by commonplace you mean monotonous, simple, petty. Life is merely terrible; I feel it as few others do. Often—and in my inmost self perhaps all the time—I doubt whether I am a human being. The wrong I have done you is only the fortuitous occasion for my realizing it. I really don't know what to do.

Franz

July 8, 1913

Today Felice, when reading your letter which is so sweet that it quite bewilders me, when trying to trace your kindness back to its source, I am left agreeing yet again, even more forcibly with what I wrote yesterday.

No one can say we have joined hands thoughtlessly; what influenced us was not proximity, which can be misleading, not a moment which can be misleading, not a word which can be misleading—and yet. By now, Felice, can't you see (look at it in the light of this last episode) what you have actually done, and what you are still at liberty to undo. It is not possible, and though I may reach out for it desperately, yet it is not for me. It is not irresolution that confounds me at every turn, rather a firm conviction which has never left me, but which I have disregarded because of and despite my love for you; ultimately, however, this conviction will not be disregarded because it springs directly from my nature.

Haven't I for months now been squirming before you like something poisonous? Am I not here one moment, there the next? Are you not beginning to feel sick at the sight of me? Can you not see by now that if disaster—yours, your disaster, Felice—is to be averted, I have to remain locked up within myself? I am not a human being; I am capable of tormenting you cold-bloodedly, you whom I love most, whom I love alone out of the entire human race

(as far as I'm concerned, I have no relatives and no friends, am unable to have them, and don't want them), and cold-bloodedly allowing you to forgive the torments I inflict. Can I tolerate this situation when I am in a position to see it so clearly, have suspected it, find my suspicions confirmed, and continue to suspect it? If need be, I can live as I am, my rage turned inward, tormenting only by letter, but as soon as we lived together I would become a dangerous lunatic fit to be burned alive. The havoc I would create! Would have to create! And if I didn't create it I would be more lost than ever, for it would be against my nature, and whoever happened to be with me would be lost. You have no idea, Felice, what havoc literature creates inside certain heads. It is like monkeys leaping about in the treetops, instead of staying firmly on the ground. It is being lost and not being able to help it. What can one do?

Reading about the way you all talk of your brother's wedding, the way his parents-in-law worship him and his parents love their daughter-in-law, do you imagine I feel any human sympathy? I do feel apprehensive, however, when I read what you say about my father, as though you were changing your allegiance, ready to side with him against me.

Franz

July 9, 1913

Dearest Felice, if you are unable to write to me, don't write to me, but let me write to you and repeat day by day what you already know: that I love you as much as I have any power to love, and that I wish to serve you and must serve you, as long as I live.

Franz

[July] 10, 1913

If only I were with you, Felice, and had the capacity to make things clear to you, or rather the capacity just to see things clearly. It's all my fault. After all, we have never been as united as we are now; this

Yes on both sides has tremendous power. But I am held back by what is almost a command from heaven; an apprehension that cannot be appeased; everything that used to be of the greatest importance to me—my health, my small income, my miserable disposition, all this for which there would be some justification—vanishes, is as nothing compared to this apprehension, and seems to be used only as a pretext. To be quite frank (as I have always been with you as far as my self-knowledge at the moment allows) and at long last to be recognized by you as the madman I am, it is my *dread of the union* even with the most beloved woman, above all with her.[108] How can I explain to you what to me is so clear that I long to cover it, to stop it blinding me! And then of course it becomes less clear again when I read your sweet, trusting letter; then everything appears to be perfectly all right, and happiness seems to await us both.

Can you understand this, Felice, if only from a distance? I have a definite feeling that through marriage, *through the union, through the dissolution* of this nothingness that I am, I shall perish, and not alone but with my wife, and that the more I love her the swifter and more terrible it will be. Now you tell me what we should do, for I believe we are now so close to each other that neither of us, without the other's corroboration, could do anything on his own. Think carefully, too, about all that has been left unsaid! *Ask questions, I shall answer every one.* God, it really is about time to ease the pressure, and there surely isn't a girl who has been loved as I love you, and been tortured as I find it necessary to torture you.

Franz

July 13, 1913

It's lovely on our balcony in the evening. I have just been sitting there for a little while. I am preposterously tired; this morning when I was supposed to get up—the night merely having tired me the more—I heartily cursed everything around me, myself in particular. If I am unable to sleep properly, how shall I ever again be able to

write properly? And if I cannot do that, then everything is but a dream, though a dream already fathomed.

Needless to say my latest plan is by no means the best plan. After all, the best plan would probably be in some clever way to raise a certain amount of money, and to go south with you forever to some island or lake. In the south I feel everything is possible. And there lead a life of seclusion, feeding on grass and fruit. But I don't need to look into myself very deeply to see that I don't even want to go south. *Simply to race through the nights with my pen, that's what I want. And to perish by it, or lose my reason, that's what I want too, since it is the inevitable and long-anticipated consequence.*

But my latest plan is as follows: The apartment I had chosen for us cannot be occupied before May of next year, provided I get it; it is in a house belonging to a cooperative building society of which I have become a member. So we won't be losing any time, Felice, if I don't write to your parents just yet. So let us remain as we are until February, January, or Christmas. You will get to know me better; there are still a number of horrible recesses in me that you don't know. You will take your summer trip and in this way as well as by means of letters from my trip, you will be able to view our situation more clearly. But above all this autumn I shall yield at last to these temptations to write, provided my state of health permits, and then see for myself what there is inside me. After all, I have still done so little; I am nothing; perhaps I shall succeed with something this autumn; I have no intention of sparing myself. Then you will see more clearly with whom you wish to cast your lot, and what it is that has to be considered. Needless to say, I shall be yours then as I am now. What do you say to this plan?

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, July 14, 1913]

On the terrace outside the summer house.[109] Lovely distant view of the countryside. Not so lovely looking back into the room. Nor into

myself, there the screw keeps turning.—On Tuesday there will be a letter with yet another plan.[110]

Best wishes. F

July 17, 1913

I could write this when I get home, but my impatience won't permit it. You don't write to me. Do you despise me? Really, you shouldn't. You see, I grudge myself the person dearest to me; in the general listlessness of my existence I hesitate to seize her; or at least I set myself a time limit. Dearest, don't despise me for it, there is a lot that is despicable about me, but not that.

Franz

July 19, 1913

I haven't had a letter from you since Sunday. It is impossible for me to know what has happened. My letter must have offended you, there is no other explanation. But if it did offend you, you must have misunderstood it, though that again is hard to believe, for after all you have known me for a whole year and must realize that I am incapable consciously of putting down a single word at which you would have reason to take offense. You yourself said that we mustn't hold things against each other, and now you want to start it? Felice, send me one word, please, nice or nasty; don't make my misery greater than it is, silence is surely the greatest punishment imaginable.

Franz

July 27, 1913

Another Sunday without you! It really is a hideous life. And it upsets me that the reason for your not writing can only be that you misunderstood my express letter. The letter you receive today will have made that clear. But should a misunderstanding between us be possible? Am I not yours, are you not mine? The fact that I am

involved up to my neck with my family, is this an argument against it? The zest with which I shall detach myself will be all the greater. Besides, who knows what would have become of me if, bloodless as I am, I hadn't been lying in this family warmth for 30 years?

But none of this presents any serious obstacle; we belong together and shall be together; we must merely find a way to make it clear to my father that not one penny of his money is to contribute to our household once we are married. The very thought of it fills me with well-being.

Even then I won't know what your parents are going to say, nor how one can get them to talk.

But now, dearest Felice, please write every day if possible, and to the office, otherwise it takes too long to reach me. But you know this, and yet time and again (time and again! in the past fortnight it was once, all told) you write to the apartment.

Well, courage and confidence and no misunderstandings!

Franz

July 28, 1913

No letter again. How can you torment me so, Felice? Torment me so unnecessarily! When even a few words would do me good and help to get rid of these headaches that grip my head like a hood. If only you were to write that you hadn't yet made up your mind, or that you were unable or unwilling to write. I would be quite satisfied with 3 words, but nothing! Nothing!

July 30, 1913

I ought to have had a letter from you yesterday, Felice, even the day before yesterday. And if no letter, then at least a telegram, in response to yesterday's letter. You oughtn't to have kept me in this state. Do you realize what I might do if I found myself abandoned by you—at least by letter—for no reason? Though I have inflicted worse torments on you in the course of this wonderful and terrible year, I have always done so out of some inner need, never an outer one, like you from Frankfurt and again now. These visitors and

relatives! I won't be able to distinguish one from the other and fear they will all be my enemies in mutual enmity. How am I to regard them if some small sign of surprise or a little discomfiture shown by the assembled company at your writing 5 lines to me instead of being with them seems to worry you more than my despair during these nights and days which, with their headaches and agitated wakefulness, are almost indistinguishable to me? Shall I mean more to you, Felice, once I am publicly your fiancé? But just as then no one will have the right, simply because you have company, to prevent you from writing to me, if writing is as important as it was on Sunday, so no one has the right to do so now, and if anyone does have it, you are not to acknowledge it. Your failure to write or send a telegram has made me unhappy, *unhappier than you can imagine.* This is neither resentment nor misunderstanding, Felice, nor does it affect my love for you, that is unassailable. It is merely well-founded sadness.

Franz

> I have re-read this letter. My dearest Felice, should you feel within yourself even the slightest possibility of taking offense at this letter, then remember that as a result of the total absence of news, you haven't the remotest idea how I have been feeling in the recent and most recent past. It's indescribable.

August 1, 1913

What a strange man I have been going around with just now! He is either a great fool or a minor prophet. But he's not going to interfere here!——

My dearest Felice, was today's letter received with understanding? Do you realize, by the way, that you will have a white-haired husband? It's awful the way I am going downhill! The palpitations, for example, that go with this letter!

Dearest, once again your travels will take you further away from me, and you are not in the least sorry. On the contrary, the house you are going to is called Sanssouci. Tell your sister she is no friend

of mine if she prevents you from writing. My parents are gradually getting used to their new worry and are beginning to incorporate it with the others. Why do you think it is better for me to write to your father while you are away? I should have thought it would actually be better if you were there when my first letter, not addressed to you, arrived at your home.

What should I consult Max about? No one else can take the responsibility, nor offer us advice, for what concerns us alone, and they are matters of grave responsibility. But if I were to follow Max's example in financial management, that would be bad indeed. Max has more money and a larger income than I; he is not at all miserly, not at all extravagant—and yet in his house there is more talk about money and the lack of it than there should be. And this very talk about money, for which no doubt his wife, though perhaps in all innocence, is to blame, enhances its importance which, even if one smarted under lack of money, one could so easily deny. I remember leaning against the mirror when his wife in front of it wrapped a lace shawl around her shoulders (her clothes, though again in all innocence, are a little conspicuous and somewhat incongruous), and for something to say, I exclaimed: "That does look sumptuous!" With a disparaging gesture, she replied: "But it's as cheap as could be!" This is sad, foolish, and degrading. And not the way I want to be.

Franz

July [presumably August] 1, 1913

So in spite of everything you want to take up the cross, Felice? Attempt the impossible? You misunderstood me: I did not say that writing ought to make everything clearer, but instead makes everything worse; what I said was that writing makes everything clearer *and* worse. This is what I meant. But this is not what you mean, and yet you wish to be mine.

I have not come to the end of my counterarguments, their list is endless; the impossibility is constantly proven. But you too reveal

yourself as constant (though not, of course, since you are a human being, as constant as the impossibility). I cannot resist a feeling of hope, and so I abandon all my counterarguments—though I must not conceal the fact that this is done in the conscious knowledge of it being a delusion. Thinking it over, your letter does not so much as touch on my counterarguments; led by your emotions (your feelings of kindness, but also of distance, as well as, in the best sense, your limited experience) you simply turn my enormous obstacles into "tiny" ones, specifically "tiny," and are confident of just enough courage to overcome them. But did I really expect a refutation? No. There were only three possible answers: "It is impossible, and so I don't want to," or "It is impossible, so I don't want to for the time being," or "It is impossible, but I want to nevertheless." I take your letter to be an answer in the third sense (*that it does not correspond exactly is worrying me enough*), and I take you for my beloved bride. And promptly (it refuses to be kept back) but perhaps for the last time, I say that I am absurdly afraid of our future and of the unhappiness which, through my fault and temperament, could develop from our life together, and which would be bound to affect you first and the more profoundly, for I am basically a cold, selfish, callous creature, despite my weakness which conceals rather than mitigates these qualities.

Now what shall we do in the first instance, Felice? All right, I will write to your parents. But before doing so, I shall have to tell my parents. This announcement, even if it consists of only 5 sentences, will be the longest conversation I shall have had with my mother for months, and with my father for years. It will thereby acquire a solemnity not altogether agreeable to me. I won't tell them until I have had a reply to this letter, *because somehow you still seem to me not wholly committed.*

What will your parents have to say to my letter? From her photograph I had imagined your mother to be different, but this had nothing to do with the fact that I was afraid of her; it is just that fear, next to indifference, is the basic feeling I have toward people. In fact, I was afraid of your entire family (with the possible exception of your sister Erna); I am not ashamed to admit this, for it

is as true as it is ridiculous. Actually, if I want to be precise, I am almost afraid of my own parents, certainly of my father. And your mother, after all, was somewhat peculiar, dressed all in black, mournful, disapproving, reproachful, observant, stiff, a stranger within her family, let alone toward me. Of her I was particularly frightened and doubt I shall ever lose my fear. On the other hand, I fear that no single member of your family will be pleased with me, that nothing I do will seem right to them, that even what I write in my first letter won't be to their liking, that as a bridegroom I shall never do what they imagine they can rightly expect of a bridegroom, that my love for you, which may never even be noticed by any stranger or relative present, is not love in their sense, that this dissatisfaction (and dissatisfaction breeds irritation, contempt, rage) will persist and may even infect you, dissatisfaction with me as well as with them. Have you the courage to face this, too?

Franz

August 2, 1913

My dear, dear Felice! There is no letter today, which is not surprising, but where your letters are concerned I can no longer differentiate between the normal and the surprising; I simply want them, must have them, live through them.

I have an idea which, if you like it, would be splendid. I could write to your father as soon as I get your reply to my last letters. Provided your parents are not apprehensive—after all, there is no particular reason for apprehension, for your parents do not know me; unless you were to give me away, in which case there certainly would be—well, provided your parents are not apprehensive, we could perhaps get engaged in the presence of our parents in a fortnight's time. If so, would it not be possible—now comes my idea—for you to return via Prague? Not that you should forfeit any part of your vacation; no, not that, merely that on your return journey you might spend a few hours in Prague. Perhaps on the last Sunday, or the last Saturday; if it were Saturday then perhaps I could

accompany you back to Berlin. Yes? Would that be a good thing? Because it would not be a good thing if I were to consider only myself. For every word and every look you exchange with my relatives is going to hurt me, not merely from jealousy, but above all because I have isolated myself from them so completely, and am happy in my isolation, whereas now through you, who are a part of my being, renewed contact with them will be, if not established, at least intimated. And this, Felice, you must always remember, when talking to them as well as to others—if you wish to spare me unhappiness. In this respect I really have myself well under control. I can on occasions, for instance, blurt out everything about myself, not deliberately, but it just happens—yet in the end everything comes pouring neatly back into me, and I am a stranger once more, although I may have disclosed the most essential part of me. In your case, I'm afraid, I would not feel the same, I value you too highly; if you were to chatter to people, I would lose myself in them through you.—But, sad as it is, you will have to meet my relatives some time, so would you come? The joy of your presence would really make anything bearable for me.

Franz

What sort of girl is that Fräulein Danziger of yours?

August 3, 1913

My dearest Felice, you can see how much I need your letters by the mere fact that each time there is no news, in itself a disaster, some further disaster befalls me. It is up to you to prevent this. I really was sad today. Again no letter. And to tell the truth, for weeks past I have been delaying my morning departure for the country so as to be able to pick up the confidently expected Sunday letter as soon as possible: and for weeks past this precaution has brought me nothing but sadness. Today, however, I did get the telegram. But it might not be meant for me. It says "Kafta" instead of Kafka, and "pliol" instead of Felice. Still, it is nice, and I am quite content.

Please, Felice, show that you have confidence in me by promising that a certain request, which I shall make only after receiving your promise, will be fulfilled by you precisely and unconditionally. It is neither bad nor impossible, so promise me, and moreover in solemn words.

Why do you think it would be of advantage to us both if my father were to pay a visit to Berlin just now? This is what you wrote. What had you in mind?

I dream about you almost every night, such is my need to be near you. But, for a multitude of reasons, my fear is just as great. I don't think I shall come to Berlin at all while we are engaged, even if we were not to get married until May. Would this be all right for you, and particularly for the others? Can you agree to it?

Franz

Have you taken any books with you? If so, which?

August 4, 1913

Dearest Felice, I withdraw everything I may have said yesterday. The apprehension that keeps me from you at present, that also prevents me from wishing you were coming to Prague, is justified; but there is still greater justification for my immense apprehension, far surpassing the other, that I shall perish if we are not together soon. For if we are not together soon, my love for you, which refuses any other thought to enter my head, would be directed toward an imaginary idea, toward a phantom, toward something totally unattainable and at the same time totally and at all times indispensable; but if this were so it might be enough to rip me out of this world. I tremble as I write. So come, Felice, come to Prague if you possibly can on your return journey.

Having made this request, I have to tell you the truth about yet another, well-nigh the most important matter, especially since you have not inquired about it for a long time and, virtually in silence, have allowed this question to be excluded from our correspondence. After all, I always used to say that it was my physical condition that

prevented me from getting married, and this condition has by no means improved since then. About 6 weeks ago, before writing one of the decisive letters, I went to see the doctor, our family doctor. I don't find him very pleasant, though hardly less pleasant than doctors in general. On the whole I don't believe what he says, but I do allow myself to be reassured by him, as much as by any doctor. In this sense doctors can be made to serve as a natural therapy. At the time, and after an intensive examination, I received this reassurance from him (against my inner conviction) in abundant measure. I wrote to you that very afternoon. Lately, however, I have had palpitations, followed by stabs and pains in the region of the heart, which no doubt are caused largely, if not altogether, by the unbearable separation from you. But they are also partly due to the fact that I have recently been swimming too much, walking too far and too fast, which I have been doing to tire myself, and thus subdue my longing for you. It has not succeeded, however, and instead I feel these pains in my heart. I went to the doctor again today. As he says, he can find nothing wrong organically, although he is not quite sure of the heart-sound being quite clear in a particular place. But he suggests that I take my vacation now (impossible), take some medicine (also impossible), sleep well (also impossible), not go south, not swim (also impossible), and lead a quiet life (least possible of all).

This you had to be told before I write the letter to your father.

But how I look forward to these letters, now that they will arrive regularly—starting, if not tomorrow, then without fail on Wednesday.

Yours, Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] Have none of my letters gone astray? This is the 4th letter to Westerland?

5th letter to Westerland

August 5, 1913

Dearest Felice, I exaggerated shamefully yesterday when I wrote that I was not expecting a letter until Wednesday. On the contrary, I expected it today without fail, absolutely without fail. And if not a letter, then a postcard from your journey. And if not a postcard, then a telegram. This begging makes me contemptible, but I lack self-control in matters of far less importance, how much more when awaiting your news. Then these thoughts keep crowding upon me: You don't like writing to me, you're not thinking about me, perhaps you love me only on account of some distant memory. Miserable, uncontrollable begging!

As a matter of fact, just now a telegram did arrive. Needless to say, I took for granted it was from you, and the maid who brought it received a radiant smile. Instead, it is from Madrid. My uncle [Alfred Löwy] who lives there is my closest relative, much closer to me than my parents, but only in a specific sense, of course. Although lately I had received three letters from him, I had not felt like writing to him. Then 5 days ago (it takes 4 days for a letter to reach Madrid, which isn't long compared to communications between Prague and Westerland) I sent him a copy of *Arkadia* one night with a covering letter in which I poured out all my troubles. And I added, after a skillful transition, that I was expecting very soon to become officially engaged (news which this uncle really should have received before my parents were told). I remembered later how remarkably close this letter came to the "Judgment." There is undoubtedly a great deal of my uncle in the "Judgment" (he is a bachelor, director of railways in Madrid, knows the whole of Europe *with the exception of Russia*), and here I was announcing my engagement in a letter similar to that of Georg to his friend, moreover in a covering letter with *Arkadia*.[111]—Well, my uncle must have misunderstood my letter; he imagines we are already officially engaged, for here is his telegram in full: "Delighted heartiest congratulations to engaged couple Uncle Alfred." Thus we are being elevated to official status from Madrid, while your parents are still living in ignorant bliss, knowing little or nothing about the terrible son-in-law they are threatened with.

Franz

August 6, 1913

At last the sight of your dear handwriting again. The postcards from Hamburg have not arrived; could you have addressed them indistinctly and illegibly? Today's postcard, for instance, reads Niklasstr. No. 6, and an error of this kind could cause me great grief.[112]

We need not mention my parents again; their audible warnings are over and done with. But I can discover no definite advice from you with regard to my letter to your father, rather three contradictory suggestions. However, I don't want advice; instead I shall mail the letter to your father (but to your father only; I have only just mentioned your mother, I can't find the proper form of addressing my letter to both your parents) as soon as I have your reply to my latest heart trouble. Today, for instance, I haven't slept at all, but not a wink; I heard the clock strike almost every quarter; meanwhile I dozed and some thought or other—which concerned you, I don't remember what it was—kept forcing its way into my dozing like a shuttle, incessantly, monotonously, and at great speed.

In my helplessness in the middle of the night I virtually suffered an attack of madness; the images became uncontrollable, everything flew apart until, in my extremity, the notion of a Napoleonic field marshal's black hat came to my rescue, descending on my consciousness and holding it together by force. My heart was beating quite magnificently at the time, and although the window was wide open and the night rather cool I threw off the blanket. And strangely enough, although in the night it had seemed out of the question that I should go to the office, I did not feel particularly ill in the morning, apart from a pain in and around the heart. And when I got your postcard and the letter at the office (so the letter written on Monday afternoon arrived on Wednesday morning), I felt even better.—It is typical of my thoroughly shaky condition that I should feel quite different from one day to the next, needless to say on the foundation of a continuously unsatisfactory basic condition.

What do you mean by my idea about your visit to Prague having been nothing but foolishness? Honestly, Felice, this is simply not true. Of course you would have to be invited by my parents, but with this done your visit would really be the simplest thing in the world. And so lovely besides, which is the decisive factor.

I have been most fortunate about my vacation. Originally I meant to travel for a fortnight, and spend the other fortnight at a sanatorium. But since it became absolutely essential for me to spend the entire time in a sanatorium, I chose one at Pegli near Genoa; this, owing to the proximity of Genoa, would have meant both travel and sanatorium. But now I hear that the season at this particular sanatorium doesn't start until October 1st, and I have to take my holiday in September. So I shall probably have to go to the San[atorium] Hartungen at Riva, on Lake Garda.[113] Pity!

I must tell you more about Max's domestic arrangements, otherwise you may misunderstand me.

Listen, photography is very much the fashion at seaside resorts; I should like to see you sitting in a beach chair, for instance, or in the sand; couldn't I be sent a photograph?

Franz

Give my regards to Frl. Danziger; we don't know each other, but she lives next to the person dearest to me, isn't this connection enough? And what a firm handwriting she has!

August 7, 1913

My dearest Felice! What's this? Headaches, fitful sleep, strange dreams, and all this at a time when you are supposed to be resting from your many troubles? It is the continued uncertainty of our situation, that's all. On receipt of your letter tomorrow I shall write to your father, and then we will both be calm and confident. Indeed, we'll have to be, you especially, for it is then that your real hardship awaits you: sharing your life with me, a man without self-control, whom you may still not visualize as he really is. Poor, dearest Felice! In gratitude for your courage, for still wanting to live with

me considering what you know about me, I would have to lie at your feet for a whole year. Once we are together I shall have plenty of opportunities to show my gratitude; I only hope, Felice, that you will have the perception to see my gratitude in everything, even if, instead of being directed immediately toward you, it is simply buried within myself. In a word, let us pray you have the gift not to be disappointed.

Please give a more detailed description, Felice, of your life at Westerland. I have a general idea, but would like to gorge myself on detail. You have never told me anything specific about your cousin. I imagine the two of you won't be alone for more than the first few days; since you all have meals together you are bound to make the acquaintance of the people in your pension. What kind of people are they? What are their names? Whom do you like, and dislike? And did nothing worth mentioning happen at sea (at the moment I am reading an old edition of *Robinson Crusoe*; here, needless to say, there is no lack of excitement at sea: "However, the storm was so violent that I saw what is not often seen, the master, the boatswain, and some others more sensible than the rest, at their prayers, and expecting every moment when the ship would go to the bottom")? And how do you spend each part of the day? Do you read? If so, what? And isn't it quite dangerous to bathe if one cannot swim?

The promise I wrung from you *in bianco*, for which I thank you very much, concerns Müller exercises. In a few days I will send you the *System for Women*, and slowly, systematically, carefully, thoroughly, and daily (for after all, you did promise, didn't you?), you will begin to do Müller exercises, report on them continually, and so give me a great deal of pleasure.[114]

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] Both your letters arrived at the same time. Go on with this regularity, and my heart will also beat with greater regularity. Wouldn't you care to send me one of your parents' letters some time, so that I can see how they write to you. You

don’t mention the prospective vegetarian housekeeping? And I expected jubilation.

August 8, 1913

I thanked you yesterday because for the first time in ages I got letters from you on two successive days, but today again there is no news. That I insist on a letter every day could be described as tyranny, but it is not, or rather it would be if I didn’t mean anything to you, in which case, of course, it is tyranny. But you should write to me, and write regularly, especially now. You know well enough how I suffer without letters. You know my present state of mind, how it is virtually dependent on the regularity of your letters; you know that if need be I am satisfied with a few hurried lines; you know you promised to write to me regularly from Westerland; you know that the letter to which I am expecting an answer was exceptionally important to me; you know I am bound to be unusually anxious if in one letter you tell me about headaches and fitful sleep, then nothing the following day—and still you don’t write to me, in spite of all my daily letters you don’t feel compelled to send a few words. Actually, I don’t even ask for daily letters, if that’s impossible; I’ve told you this often enough: *all I want is to have regular letters, but even this is denied me.* And you can bear to let Wednesday go by without sending me so much as a picture postcard, although you know that on Friday I tremble from one mail delivery to the next. Oh dear, what’s the good of you dreaming about me when I have proof that you don’t give me a thought during the day? And it’s not the first time. You are doing me a wrong, Felice, no matter whether the reasons that prevent your writing are personal or practical.

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Workers’ Accident Insurance Institute]

August 9, 1913

When I got your two Wednesday letters this morning and heard that one of them had actually arrived last night, I was going to send you a telegram to ask you to forgive me for yesterday's letter. But when I had read both letters I was unable to do so. These letters are really wrested from time and the heart, and fill me with despair. I am not quite as desperate as I would be had I received nothing, this I admit, yet in a different way the disaster is far greater. If only, when in this frame of mind, you wrote nothing but postcards, so that one …

This much I wrote at the office, I was desperately unhappy. Frozen, I just sat over these letters in which, even at the 100th reading and with immense self-deception, I could find nothing I was looking for. With only a few superficial changes, these could be letters to a stranger, or rather this is what they couldn't be, for in that case—it seems to me—they would be less casual, not perhaps in the way they are written, but in feeling. Dearest Felice, I am not crazy, after all; though I may be oversensitive, especially at this time and vis-à-vis you, because to me you are of irreplaceable value, but be that as it may, the things I cannot find in your letters are things that are simply not there. It is again the bewilderment I experienced at times when we were together (then, as by some inner compulsion, you seemed overwhelmed by lassitude and inaccessible to me), and strangely enough experience each time you leave Berlin. It was the same when you went to Frankfurt, when you were in Göttingen and Hamburg. Does traveling act as a distraction, or make you more alert? These, after all, are facts that cannot be denied, and yet can be explained. When I compare in my mind the very first letter you wrote to me with the most recent, then, Felice, however crazy it may seem, I am almost bound to choose the first as having given me more pleasure. This is but an isolated letter, and as recently as in the last but two you showed immeasurably more kindness than I deserve. However, I have the last two letters as well, and the question of merit does not arise. If you can give me an explanation, a satisfactory one, not merely pointing to the figments of my imagination, then please, please, Felice, do so. Give an explanation for the few letters written in this fashion and for the number that were never written. Among the written ones, those

from Frankfurt head the list, then comes the letter from the zoo (written under the table), and then this last one of Wednesday evening, telling me nothing except that “Erna scolds me all day long, complaining that I spend all day in my room writing instead of going out into the fresh air.” Dearest Felice, what is the meaning of this, what are you trying to say?

And yet I must confess that when contemplating the picture I found on reaching home, I feel my ties with you to be immensely powerful, and if the memory of this morning’s suffering hadn’t given me the strength to record the above, to put down what absolutely must be said, I would have preferred to say nothing but thank you, as I do continually when contemplating your picture.

Yours, Franz

August 10, 1913

At last, Felice, I have your telegram, for which I thank you very much and ask you to forgive my unjust reproaches and the spoiling of your vacation, for which I may be to blame. Well, I went to the office today to collect Friday’s postcard. (Nothing from Thursday in case you wrote that day, but it may have been addressed to the apartment and so won’t arrive till tomorrow), but this is not really the point; after all, I am not a devil superintending your writing; it is just that I take fright at the contents of your letters, which really do suggest that I am such a devil who somehow needs to be appeased to stop his tormenting. This, Felice, is what recurs in everything I have received from you in the past few days. Two letters ago: “You certainly cannot complain now, etc.” In the last one: “Erna scolds me, etc.” On today’s postcard: “To stay indoors would be a sin.…” But dearest Felice! Don’t we write about writing, the way others talk about money? Is the latter worse than the former? It would be awful if you wrote for my sake only.

I am afraid to mail this letter, perhaps I am not competent to judge, and if I’m not, then again it is for the same reason, and so can be justified.

Is it the immense distance that drives you from me? Are these your true feelings which had temporarily been smothered by me? But you are steadfast, able to see things clearly, you have yourself well in hand—which makes these ever-recurring intervals the more serious, the more significant.

Yours, Franz

August 11, 1913

Your postcard from Kampen[115] arrived today. (Could Thursday's postcard have gone astray, like the one from Hamburg?) If I am to tell the truth, I get more genuine pleasure from a postcard like this than from your recent letters. Nothing bad can be read into it, and with some self-deception one can detect something good. You had been on some pleasant expedition which someone (who is it?) finds "enchanting." You thought about me a little and, if it weren't for what had gone before, I could be perfectly content.

This is not a question of momentary satisfaction, however, and least of all my own; the question rather is this: If it is your wish, Felice, to take upon yourself the sacrifice of becoming my wife—I have made every effort in accordance with the truth to prove, down to the last detail, that it is a sacrifice—then, unless you wish to condemn us both to endless misery, you mustn't take a frivolous view of your affection for me, let alone have no views about it. No one can expect your feelings for me to be entirely clear to you, but you yourself must be sure of them. But faced by your last letters, and remembering earlier similar periods, I despair of finding that assurance in you. Somewhere deeply hidden within you (I can think of no other explanation) there must be an illusion, which from time to time stops working, and this must at least make you suspect its presence, yet you are never able to locate it, since for some obscure reason you are not looking for it. Yet this, above all, would be your duty. It may be but a minor prejudice, one that could be removed with ease, simply a weakness, yet equally it may be the very thing that now keeps you from me at times, but that in future might keep

you from me altogether. Or is there nothing that keeps you from me when, for example—and it isn't the only example—you dispose of the question of our seeing each other again in the following 3 sentences: "It is quite out of the question for me to come to Prague now. But what makes you say that you could not possibly come to Berlin for the time being? What about the Christmas vacation?" And we are now in August.—I know, Felice, that what I am doing now, seen from the outside, is dreadful. It may be the worst thing I have done to you, yet at the same time the most necessary. You have no wish to hear the undertones of what you say—don't keep to the one example—which is why I am repeating it for you once again in a loud voice.

Franz

August 12, 1913

It fills me with horror, Felice, when I imagine that on a lovely morning, after a reasonably good night, you sit at breakfast in anticipation of a pleasant day ahead, and morning after morning you are handed my infernal letters, like messages from the underworld. But what can I do, Felice? In your last letters and postcards I get no feeling of your nearness to me, your help, your definite determination, and unless I can be sure of that, I can effect no contact with your parents, since you, you alone create my only valid connection with people, and *you alone will be the one to create it in future.* So I shall have to await your reply to yesterday's letter. Don't you understand my position, Felice? My own suffering is far greater than the suffering I inflict—but this, though it means a great deal, does not in itself exonerate me in any way.

Yours, Franz

[August 14, 1913]

Dearest Felice! Only in this last letter do I recognize you again. You have been as though hidden behind clouds as recently as in

Monday's letter (which, probably owing to insufficient postage, I did not get until today, Thursday) and in the first of Tuesday's. I asked myself whether I have the evil eye for being dissatisfied with all these letters. They kept telling me about the drawbacks of the Ullsteinhalle. Who would doubt the difficulties of writing there, but who expects you to write there? The very picture of the Ullsteinhalle was enough to hurt my eyes. You wrote in pencil anyway, so couldn't you have written a few lines at breakfast or on the beach? Moreover, I saw various signs suggesting that you read my letters very carelessly. One example: I wrote about my uncle in Madrid; you removed him to Milan. That was of little consequence, but you might just as well have removed one of my most serious scruples to some other quarter, without putting it into words, and without my noticing.

It was only your second Tuesday letter that somewhat reassured me, and I believe it is once more my Felice. She has reappeared again at last. Perhaps it is just that you are tired, Felice. It would be a miracle if you weren't. Well, I won't consider any other conceivable possibility, and the letter to your parents will leave at the same time as this. They will travel together as far as Berlin.

The man in your pension should leave graphology alone. I am certainly not "very determined in my behavior" (unless you have had this experience); furthermore, I am by no means "extremely sensual," but have a magnificent, inborn capacity for asceticism; I am not good-natured; it's true that I am thrifty, but "from necessity"—never; as for being generous—no, certainly not; and whatever else the man said, the things you couldn't remember, will have been very much the same. Even "artistic interests" is not true; in fact of all the erroneous statements, that is the most erroneous. I have no literary interests, but am made of literature, I am nothing else, and cannot be anything else. The other day I read the following story in a *History of Devil Worship*: "There was a cleric with a voice so sweet and so beautiful that all who heard it were filled with joy. One day a priest heard the sweetness of these sounds and said: 'This is not the voice of a man, but of the devil.' In the presence of all the many admirers he exorcised the demon and drove him out,

whereupon the corpse (for this body had been animated by the devil instead of a soul) disintegrated and stank."[116] The relationship between me and literature is similar, very similar to that, except that my literature is not as sweet as that monk's voice.—To discover this from my handwriting, however, one would certainly have to be a very astute graphologist.

To your graphologist I now add a critic. The other day a review of *Meditation* appeared in the *Literary Echo.*[117] It is very friendly, but in itself not otherwise noteworthy. Only one remark is striking; in the course of the discussion the reviewer mentions: "Kafka's bachelor art …" What do you think of that, Felice?

Briefly, about the other points: I absolutely insist upon the Müller exercises, I am mailing the book today; if they bore you, it shows you are not doing them properly; try hard to do them exactly as prescribed (*progressing, needless to say, with great caution!*), and their immediately noticeable effects will prevent you from being bored; you needn't worry about your cooking; while she is asleep, place a towel carefully over your cousin's face when she talks in her sleep.

Franz

August 15, 1913

And now, Felice, calm yourself. This is your vacation and it is summer; there should be anxiety neither indoors nor out. I have told your parents the bare facts;[118] it was not easy to combine the essential with the truthful in such a way as to make it both readable and comprehensible to your parents; I have succeeded, however, if only in part. At any rate, between us there will be no more talk about fears and worries, whatever may be left of them must be crushed between our teeth. Undoubtedly the reproaches in my recent letters were largely unjustified; I don't wish to discuss them in detail, but these reproaches were due not merely to hurt feelings over certain passages in your letters, they sprang from some deeper anxiety. Let us forget about them! I have found a way to stop tormenting you with these things. I write down what is most urgent,

but do not send it off; perhaps there will come a time when we shall be able to read it together in peace, when perhaps, perhaps, it can all be disposed of more easily and quickly by one reassuring look and a squeeze of the hand than in any letter on its leisurely journey from Westerland. Consider these latest sufferings I have inflicted, Felice, as part of the sacrifice, already begun, which the union with me entails. This is all I can say. Include it in your considerations and in your reply when your parents question you about my letter.

And from now on don't write to me so much. A hectic correspondence is a sign that something is wrong. Peace requires no letters. Nothing in itself will change through my becoming your fiancé in the eyes of the whole world, but at least it is the signal for the end of all outward expressions of doubts and fears. Consequently there is no further need for as many letters; there is need only for the utmost regularity in writing, a regularity calculated to a hair's breadth. You will be amazed what a poor though punctual letter writer I shall turn into once I am your fiancé. There will be increasingly stronger ties, compared to which letters will be ridiculous.

Franz

August 18, 1913

Dearest Felice, you are not falling ill, are you? You don't feel too well? What does this mean? And why don't you explain it more thoroughly? Must I blame myself for making you ill by tormenting you? Is there no other cause? And what is it? And you are still not sleeping well? Honestly, my sleeplessness should be enough for the two of us. Do you get enough rest? Are you eating good and sensible food? Whatever is the meaning of your not feeling too well? Don't write any more letters, postcards only, but please, Felice, add some short explanation or a little hope to such news as that you are not very well. If you write merely that you are not feeling too well, I can stare at that for hours without finding an explanation, at least without finding a sensible explanation. And don't send cards with

those little pictures, but proper picture postcards, so that I can get some idea of where and how you live; for after all, this is the most important thing to me.

The mail is having fun with us again. I have only now, Monday, received your Friday letter; and the Flaubert, which really should have reached you by last Monday, also doesn't seem to have arrived until now. What life there is in that book! If one clings to it, this life seeps into one, whoever one may be.

Yesterday Max returned from his travels; I went to see him, his parents were there too, and from them I heard the great news that someone from somewhere—no one would ever tell me who—had congratulated Frau Brod. I heard nothing, understood nothing, had a headache from a sleepless night, and settled down to staring vacantly around the room. Although this was but the expression of wretchedness, it was at the same time the expression of sorrow at the thought of strangers intruding or wishing to intrude in my affairs, a right that, even with the utmost consideration for their friendship, sympathetic interest, kindness, and readiness to help, I cannot concede at any time.

The photographs! Felice. The photographs! One grows impatient!

Look, what a beautiful poem I have received, it has just appeared in *März*.[119] Please return it to me. Well, that's where we lay two years ago. I have forgotten the name of the village, quite close to Lugano.—And now see to it that you get well. Your cousin and your girl friend should do nothing but wait on you and look after you. If only I could take part in some way.

Franz

August 20, 1913

Now you see, Felice, how right I was for reproaching you for not thinking of me enough. Or were you thinking of me when you ventured out far enough to be in danger? No, I was not in your thoughts then at all. And are you all right again now? And you are still having palpitations! No, Felice, I don't want you to take after

me in this respect. Let my heart carry on the way my worn-out nerves allow, but let your heart continue on its natural peaceful course. And how can a sore throat be the result of a shock? This isn't very clear. Have you seen a doctor? Tell me, Felice, had you not more resistance before you knew me? Am I not more to blame than all the waves? Even if, during this past year, I had tormented you but half as much as I have tormented myself—with the result that my hair, to your future horror more than mine, is getting whiter every day. You once wrote that you were afraid of having a bald-headed suitor, and now an almost white-haired man offers you his hand in marriage.

Today's letter reminds me that in one respect at least we are exact opposites. You enjoy, you need verbal exchanges; personal contact does you good; writing confuses you; to you it is no more than an imperfect substitute, usually not a substitute at all; there were many letters you really did not answer, and considering your kindness and willingness, undoubtedly for one reason only—that writing is contrary to your nature, whereas you would have been quite ready to express your opinions on this or that by word of mouth.

In my case it is the exact opposite. Talking is altogether against my nature. Whatever I may say is wrong, in my sense. For me, speech robs everything I say of its seriousness and importance. To me it seems impossible that it should be otherwise, since speech is continuously influenced by a thousand external factors and a thousand external constraints. Hence I am silent not only from necessity, but likewise from conviction. Writing is the only appropriate form of expression for me, and will continue to be so even when we are together. But for you, dependent as you are by nature on speaking and listening, will my writing—whatever may be granted to me—suffice as my main, my only means of communication (though probably addressed to no one but you) ?

Franz

August 21, 1913

Dear Felice, I got home too late yesterday to reply by telegram to yours of yesterday. In any case you must have received my letter by yesterday evening.

I was prevented from writing to you on Sunday in the following manner: I was wandering around the streets on my own when I remembered that we had said and written very little, and mostly by innuendo, about the most important subject, or at least (how unsure my hand is today, isn't it? But I can write quite steadily too, see!) about a subject connected with this matter of the greatest importance. What could be more natural than that I should make speed for home and write everything down as lucidly as possible and lay it before you. It was evening, which helped to enhance the lucidity of what had to be written. What did I care about sleep! Then I met a friend; we began to talk, a soothing, diverting, meaningless conversation, and by the time I had got rid of him my thoughts had become more human; I thought of the torments I had been inflicting upon you all along, and for the time being left this most important letter unwritten. If I sinned by not writing—which no doubt I did—I sinned with the best of intentions. And now, on reading that you had spent Monday in bed, and could have done with anything rather than worries, I blessed my friend.

Whether you ought to write to my mother? Surely your father should answer my letter first. But after that, if all has gone well, do whichever you prefer, write to my mother or wait for her to write to you. I have no feelings about it. If you want her to write to you first, then she will write to you first.

It is unlikely that I shall be coming to Berlin before my vacation, Felice. First of all, you would derive little pleasure from me in my present state (by which I do not mean to anticipate future impressions). Secondly, the engagement period appeals to neither of us (though possibly for different reasons). There is something to be said for oriental marriage customs where the bridegroom does not set eyes on the bride until the wedding. The veil is raised: "So that's Felice!" and he is at her feet. But she, at sight of the white-haired man, starts back. Thirdly, I want to keep my vacation time intact,

and there isn't another free Sunday. These are the general reasons. Do you accept them?

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] The photographs! And your sister's letter!

August 22, 1913

Nothing has been left undiscussed, Felice, have no fear; but perhaps the most important subject was not fully grasped by you. This is not a reproach, not a vestige of a reproach; you have done everything humanly possible, but what you haven't got you cannot grasp. No one can. For it is I alone who carry all anxieties and fears within me, as alive as snakes; I alone who scrutinize them constantly, and only I know what they are. You know about them only from me, only from my letters, and what you learn about them from these letters bears—in its horror, persistence, magnitude, and invincibility—even less relation to reality than does my writing, which heaven knows is little enough. All this I realize when reading yesterday's letter, so full of kindness and confidence; all recollections of me in Berlin must have been forgotten when you wrote. The life that awaits you is not that of the happy couples you see strolling along before you in Westerland, no lighthearted chatter arm in arm, *but a monastic life at the side of a man who is peevish, miserable, silent, discontented, and sickly*; a man who, and this will seem to you akin to madness, is chained to invisible literature by invisible chains and screams when approached because, so he claims, someone is touching those chains.

Your father is hesitant with his reply, which is understandable, but that he should be hesitant with his questions as well seems to me to prove that his doubts are only general ones, which by obtaining information—quite untruthfully—would be cleared up in no time; and that he overlooks the one passage in my letter that could give me away, because it lies entirely outside his own experience. This must not be allowed, I told myself all night, and

proceeded to draft a letter[120] that would make it clear to him. It isn't finished, nor will I send it; it was but an outburst, which didn't even relieve me.

Franz

August 24, 1913

Dearest Felice, the maid woke me from my semistupor and handed me your letter. It was like an adjunct to the garish images that pass through my head while in that continuous half-awake state in which I now spend all my nights. But at whatever hour of the night the maid were to bring your letter, it would at all times fall in quite naturally with my thoughts which are concerned solely with you and our future.

Poor dearest Felice! That I suffer more with you than with anyone else, and torment you more than anyone else, is both terrible and just. I break in half, so to speak. I duck to avoid my own blows, while taking the greatest pains to deliver them. If this isn't the worst possible omen for us!

Not a bent for writing, my dearest Felice, not a bent, but my entire self. A bent can be uprooted and crushed. But this is what I am; no doubt I myself can be uprooted and crushed, but what will happen to you? You are abandoned, yet live at my side. You will feel abandoned if I live the way I have to, and you will be truly abandoned if I don't live that way. Not a bent, not a bent! The very smallest detail of my life is determined by and hinges on it. You say you will get used to me, dearest; but amid how much perhaps unbearable suffering! Are you capable of actually visualizing a life in which, during autumn and winter at least, as I have told you before, we shall have but *one* hour a day together? A life in which, as a married woman, you will find loneliness harder to bear than you can possibly imagine now from afar, as a single girl in familiar and fitting surroundings? You would shrink back in derision from the idea of a convent, yet you contemplate living with a man whose natural ambition (and incidentally his circumstances, too) oblige

him to lead a monastic life? Let us be calm, Felice, calm! I had a calm, carefully considered letter from your father today, in contrast to which the state I am in seemed like madness, outside this world. And yet your father's letter is calm merely because I have deceived him. While his letter is friendly and open, mine was nothing but a screen concealing the most lamentable ulterior motives with which I am continuously compelled to attack you, my dearest Felice, whose curse I am. Your father, quite naturally, makes no decisions, but leaves the decision to a discussion with you and your mother. Be honest with your father, Felice, since I haven't been. Tell him who I am, show him some letters, with his help step out of the accursed circle into which, blinded by love as I was and am, I forced you with letters, pleas, and supplications.

Franz

August 24, 1913

You ask how I have been? My condition is such that since I had your telegram—that is, for 4 days—the letter to your father has been lying, completed, in my drawer.

The moment I had read your letter today I went next door, where my parents always have their brief game of cards after luncheon, and asked at once: "Father, so what do you think about my wanting to get married?" These were the first words I had uttered to my father about you. Needless to say, my mother has told him everything she knows. Have I already told you that I admire my father? You know that he is my enemy, and I his, as is determined by our temperaments, but apart from this my admiration for him as a man is perhaps as great as my fear of him. I can manage to avoid him; but ignore him, never. Like every one of our conversations (but it wasn't a conversation; like all our so-called conversations it consisted of uncontrolled remarks on my side, and powerful orations on his)—like every one of our conversations this one started with irritable remarks on his side, and the registering of his irritability on mine. I feel unable at present, too weak, to describe the whole

thing, not that I had been especially unnerved by this conversation; after all, I am well aware of my inferiority vis-à-vis my father, I realize it, and it certainly affects my father more than it affects me. The substance of his oration centered around the difficulties in which, by marrying, I would find myself with regard to my income —difficulties that, owing to my lack of purpose (here came horrible accusations about my having persuaded him to invest in the unsuccessful asbestos factory, to which I no longer paid any attention), I would not be able to endure, let alone resolve. As an additional argument, with some bearing on my affairs which is no longer quite clear to me now, he addressed his reproaches partly to thin air, partly to my mother, and partly to me as well, for my second sister's marriage with which, from the financial point of view, he is (and with good reason) dissatisfied. About half an hour passed in this fashion. Finally, as is usual toward the end of these scenes, he becomes gentle, not really gentle, but relatively gentle, so that one is helpless when confronted by him, above all I myself, who haven't a word to say to him that is genuinely felt. (But perhaps the strangest of all in my relationship with him is that I am capable of feeling and suffering to the utmost not with him, but within him.) And in the end he said (the transitions are omitted from my description) he was prepared, if I so wished, to go to Berlin, see your family, advance what in his opinion are irrefutable objections, and, if a marriage were agreed upon in spite of these objections, he would say no more.

Now, Felice, do intervene in this discussion with my father. You will really have to give me a little support. My father, after all, is a stranger to you. So, for a beginning, would it be a good thing for him to come to Berlin? Is this the appropriate moment? And how is it to be arranged? Answers are needed here as swift and astute as snakes.

Franz

[Presumably during the night from] August [24 to] 25, 1913

Dearest Felice, I may not have put things quite accurately this afternoon. I rely so much on the moment and its influences. So try to understand me! What my father said is consent, after his fashion, as far as he can give his consent to anything I want. He talks about his children's happiness being close to his heart, and he hardly ever tells a deliberate lie, he has too strong a character for that. But the fears that lie behind it—that's another matter. In this respect he may be rather like your mother: he foresees catastrophe everywhere. When he was younger and still had complete confidence in himself and his health, these fears were not so pronounced, least of all when dealing with anything he had started and carried out himself. But today he fears everything, and, horrible as it may be, these fears, at any rate in important matters, are invariably confirmed. These constant warnings mean no more in the end than that happiness is a rare thing, and this, after all, is a fact. But then my father has worked hard all his life, and from nothing has made, comparatively speaking, something. This progress, however, came to an end years ago, when his daughters were grown up, and now, owing to their marriages, it has turned into a frightful never-ending decline. My father has the feeling that his sons-in-law as well as his own children, save for me at present, are permanently around his neck. This feeling, alas, is completely justified, and enormously intensified by my father's illness, a hardening of the arteries. Now he reasons as follows: if I marry, I who so far have not been included in these worries, I am bound to get into financial difficulties, if not at once, then certainly in 2 years' time; and then, however much I may deny it now, I would come to him, almost paralyzed with worry as he is, for help; or, if I didn't, he would still try somehow to provide it, thus hastening his own ruin and the ruin of all those whom he believes to be dependent on him. You should see him in this light, Felice. But now, after all this, allow me—and this is something I have not dared to imagine for a long time—allow me to give you a long, calm kiss, as calm as possible.

Yours, Franz

*If only one could somehow reassure him, at least on this one point!* I have no proper appreciation of money (I may have inherited from my father avarice in little things, but not, alas, his acquisitiveness), and even less for the necessities of life. If my father tells me we'll get into financial difficulties, I believe it; and if you tell me we won't get into difficulties, I believe it even more readily. Anyway, I can't argue about it with my father; this would require a far sharper tongue than mine.

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And please, Felice, do write regularly in these trying times!

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Brühl is a terrible man. First he embezzles, then he has an affair, or are the two connected? Haven't most of the children started earning a living?

August 27, 1913

If you are my guardian angel—and every day I am more convinced that you are—then I have been without a guardian angel for a long time now. I think I shall have a lot to say to you in reply to tomorrow's letter. But first I shall have to see what is in the letter.

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

[August 28, 1913]

Felice, today I got your letter, the letter-card, and the letter from your father. You must have had letters from me on both Sunday and Monday, and, according to your letter you seem to have received them, yet you do not reply to them. Nor does your father's letter contain the slightest suggestion that you have discussed with him that aspect of marriage which might be hazardous for you. But he has to be told, for he is not only concerned indirectly, he is concerned directly. If only I could talk, I would come to Berlin, but I can't, so have to write, and in the enclosed letter to your father I

have put down very briefly and superficially all that has to be said. Please, please, dearest Felice, do give him this letter! It has to be.[121]

Franz

My mother? For the last 3 evenings, ever since she began to suspect my troubles, she has begged me to get married whatever happens; she wants to write to you; she wants to come to Berlin with me, she wants goodness knows what! And hasn't the remotest idea what my needs are.

*To Felice's father, Herr Carl Bauer*

[August 28, 1913]

Dear Herr Bauer,

Now that I have extracted from you your two kind letters, I don't know whether you will have the patience and the desire to listen to what follows. But I do know that I have to say it. I would have to say it even if your letters had not inspired me with the confidence I now have in you.

What I told you in my first letter about my relationship with your daughter is true, and will remain so. But apart from one allusion which may have escaped your notice, something decisive was missing. Perhaps you thought there was no need to comment on it, because you believe that coming to grips with my character is entirely your daughter's affair and had already been achieved. This is not so. At times I used to think that it had, but again and again it turned out that it had not happened, and could not happen. I have deluded your daughter with my letters; as a rule I have not meant to deceive her (although sometimes I have, because I loved her, and love her, and have been terribly aware of our incompatibility), and perhaps by doing just this, I blinded her. I really don't know.

You know your own daughter: she is a gay, healthy, self-confident girl, who in order to live should be surrounded by gay, healthy, and lively people. You know me only from my visit (I was about to add

that this should be enough), and I cannot repeat what I have told your daughter about myself in some 500 letters. But please consider this one important fact: my whole being is directed toward literature; I have followed this direction unswervingly until my 30th year, and the moment I abandon it I cease to live. Everything I am, and am not, is a result of this. I am taciturn, unsociable, morose, selfish, a hypochondriac, and actually in poor health. Fundamentally I deplore none of this: it is the earthly reflection of a higher necessity. (What I am really capable of is not the problem here, and has no connection with it.) I live within my family, among the kindest, most affectionate people—and am more strange than a stranger. In recent years I have spoken hardly more than twenty words a day to my mother, and I exchange little more than a daily greeting with my father. To my married sisters and brothers-in-law I do not speak at all, although I have nothing against them. I lack all sense of family life.

And is your daughter, whose healthy nature has destined her for a happy married life, to live with this kind of man? Is she to tolerate a monastic existence with a person who, though he loves her as he can never love anyone else, spends most of his time in his room or wandering about by himself—simply because of his irrevocable vocation? Is she to tolerate a life utterly divorced from her parents, her family, and almost any other social contact—because I, who would lock my door against my best friend, cannot imagine any other kind of married life? Could she stand this? And what for? For my writing, which is highly problematic in her eyes and perhaps even in mine? And for this she is to live alone in a foreign town, in a marriage that may turn out to be a relationship of love and friendship rather than a real marriage?

I have said the minimum of what I intended to say. Above all: I want to make no excuses for myself. On our own, your daughter and I could find no solution: I love her too much, and she cannot see me as I am. And perhaps she wants the impossible only out of compassion, no matter how much she may deny it. Well, now we are three. You be the judge!

Very sincerely yours, Dr. F. Kafka

August 30, 1913

Dearest Felice, you don't know me, you don't know me in my baseness, and even this baseness can be traced to that core which you can call literature, or anything you like. What a wretched writer, and how angry I am with myself to think that I have been unable to convince you of it. (Since early morning, and even now, my hand is pressed against my left temple, otherwise I couldn't function.)

What is stopping me can hardly be said to be facts; it is fear, an insurmountable fear, fear of achieving happiness, a desire and a command to torment myself for some higher purpose. That you, dearest, should be forced to land under the wheels of this carriage, which is destined for me alone, is really terrible. I am consigned to darkness by my inner voice, yet in reality am drawn to you; this is irreconcilable; yet even if we were to try, the blows would fall alike on you and me.

Dearest, I certainly don't want you to be other than you are; after all, it's you I love and not a mirage. But then again there is that tyranny which my very existence imposes upon you; this contradiction tears me apart. It also proves the impossibility of it.

If you were here and I saw your suffering (it wouldn't be just that, your suffering at a distance is worse), if I were able to help, if we could get married at once, without thinking, I would of course let everything go, I would even let misfortune take its course. But this is not the way out at present. Considering your dear, suicidal letter received today, I could almost promise to let everything rest the way it was in your sense, and to torment you no more. But how many times have I promised this! I cannot vouch for myself. With your next letter, or perhaps during this very night, this fear will return, I can't escape it, it will be impossible to live through the period of our engagement. What hitherto has been repeated every month, will be repeated every week. Every other letter will occasion frightening associations for me, and that terrible humming top

inside me will start spinning again. This won't be your fault, it never has been, Felice; the fault lies in the general impossibility of it. For example, I read your last letter. It isn't possible for you to imagine the alarm it created in me. The considered reflections that had led your parents to give their consent lay before me. What did I care about these considerations? I detested these considerations. You wrote about your mother's potential love for me! What should I do with her love? I who could never return it, who never could or would wish to be equal to her love! Even the extensive discussion with your parents horrified me. Even the connection between engagement and holidays, and the actual putting into words of this connection, terrified me. This is madness, I see it clearly, but at the same time it is ineradicable, that I know.

And yet these are merely indications of my true nature, which would never stop undermining you. Do realize this, Felice; I am prostrate before you and implore you to push me aside; anything else means ruin for us both. This is the word, I believe, I wrote in January; again it is bursting forth; it cannot be suppressed. If I could rip myself open before you, you would say it yourself.

Franz

September 2, 1913

I have calmed down, Felice; on Sunday I lay in the woods with a headache and kept turning my head in the grass with the pain; today it is better, but my self-control is no greater than it was before; when dealing with myself I am powerless. I can divide myself in my thoughts; I can stand at your side, calm and contented, and while doing so watch my utterly pointless self-torture; in my thoughts I can look down upon us both, and at the sight of the pain I inflict upon you, the kindest of girls, I can pray for some exquisite torture for myself; this I can do. The other day I wrote down the following wish: "When passing a house, to be pulled in through the ground-floor window by a rope tied around one's neck and to be hauled up, bloody and ragged, through all the ceilings, furniture,

walls, and attics, without consideration, as if by a person who is paying no attention, until the empty noose, dropping the last shreds of me when breaking through the roof tiles, appears on the roof."

But in reality I can do nothing, am entirely shut in on myself, and hear your beloved voice only from afar. God knows from what source these perpetual, steadily revolving worries feed! I cannot get the better of them. I thought (and so did you) that I'd grow calmer once I had written to your father. The opposite has happened; intensified assault greatly intensifies the force of these worries and anxieties. This is the law by which all weaklings are governed, insisting on extreme atonement and extreme radical measures. The desire to renounce the greatest human happiness for the sake of writing keeps cutting every muscle in my body. I am unable to free myself. Everything is obscured by the apprehensions I feel at the idea of not renouncing.

Dearest, everything you say to me, I say almost all the time; the slightest detachment from you makes me smart; whatever happens between us is repeated with renewed intensity inside myself; faced with your letters, faced by your pictures, I succumb. And yet—of the four men I consider to be my true blood-relations (without comparing myself to them either in power or in range), Grillparzer,[122] Dostoevski, Kleist,[123] and Flaubert, Dostoevski was the only one to get married, and perhaps Kleist, when compelled by outer and inner necessity to shoot himself on the Wannsee, was the only one to find the right solution. All this might be entirely irrelevant as far as we are concerned; after all, each one of us lives life anew—even if I were standing in the very center of the shadow they cast upon our own time. But this is a fundamental question of life and faith in general, and from this point of view interpreting the behavior of these four men makes more sense.

But, dearest, none of this makes sense when held against the torments I inflict now, and which are undeniable, whereas I can only anticipate the torment that the future holds for you. You are so sweet and kind; if I were once to kneel before you I don't think I could ever leave again. It was angelic of you to ignore what I said about your letter concerning your parents. (Your telegram arrived

this minute. Dearest, don't torment yourself! I didn't get your letter until noon today. As you know, postal deliveries to the apartment are very unreliable. And it's now 5:30, too late for me to send a telegram.)

I don't insist that you give that letter to your father. I wrote it merely in my agitation, and just in case. The final decision rests neither with your father nor with me, but only with you. Perhaps it is not for your father to make the decision; I am caught up in contradictions and unable to move, contradictions that have existed from the very beginning.

So don't hand that letter to your father if you don't want to, but I can't write another letter now either, my hands are tied. Tell him I disconcerted you about something that had to be cleared up, and that you don't want me to write to him—both of which are true. You couldn't fail to have been disconcerted, and you won't allow me to write the way I should have to write if I wrote now. So tell him that, will you?

Undoubtedly, it would be best for the two of us to meet in Dresden or in Berlin. In every way. Even if I don't know what to say, and merely stand there. Not that this would do me much good, in a higher sense, considering the state I am in at present, but this is immaterial.

However, I am going away on Saturday. Have I told you about the International Congress for First Aid and Hygiene? Yesterday at the last moment it was decided that I should go after all.[124] Which means losing several days of my vacation, but it will have several advantages. I am going to Vienna on Saturday, will probably stay there until the following Saturday, then on to Riva to the sanatorium, where I will stay, and then for the last few days I may take a short trip through northern Italy. If Riva isn't warm enough I will simply go further south.

Devote this time, Felice, to regaining your peace of mind; and when you have, you will be able to see me more clearly. Before your steady gaze I spun around like a will-o'-the-wisp; consider whether what you have seen only in haste and confusion can be of decisive importance in the long run. I am ready to forego all letters for the

sake of your peace of mind; during this time write only in case of extreme need. And I won't write to you properly, either. But in my notebook while traveling I will keep noting observations and comments, will collect them and send them to you two or three times a week. In this way we won't be in intimate touch—so upsetting to you, for which I am to blame—and yet we won't be out of touch.

And on my return we can meet wherever you like; after all that time we should be able to face each other calmly again. If you were to agree to this!

Yours, Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Vienna, September 7, 1913]

Best wishes. Staying Hotel Matschakerhof where Grillparzer used to take his lunch; as Laube, his biographer, said: "Simple but good."[125] Nevertheless I shall move tomorrow, hence address Main Post Office, poste restante. Relentless insomnia.

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Vienna, September 9, 1913]

I went to the Zionist Congress this morning. I have no real contact. I feel it in certain respects, also for the entire concept, but not for the essential part.——

So far not even a moment for the diary.

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: H. Mayreders Hotel Matschakerhof, Vienna]

September 9, 1913

Impossible to keep a diary at the moment. Instead of thanking my director for taking me along to Vienna, I wish I had begged him on my knees not to take me. Insomnia, insomnia! First time in this condition while traveling. At night cold compresses around my head, but still toss about in vain, wishing I were lying several storeys down in the ground. I refuse invitations whenever possible, but still meet a tremendous number of people and sit at meals like a ghost.

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Chamber of Deputies]

[Vienna,] 9 P.M., September 13, 1913

I am not proceeding with the diary about Vienna. It would be best if the days I have spent in Vienna could be obliterated—one and all. I am leaving for Trieste tomorrow morning at 8:45, arriving there at 9:10 P.M. On Monday I am going on to Venice. I am sleeping better now, but inwardly I am insecure in every direction. Moreover, I shall now be traveling alone and shall be able to see whether the aversion to my traveling companions was greater than my incapacity for independent action, foreign languages, happy coincidences. I got your telegram. My address is Venice, poste restante; since I probably won't be staying there long, I will arrange for everything to be forwarded.

Franz

[*Notes about the time of September 6, 7 and 8, 1913, on four pages of a notebook, written on both sides.* UPPER MARGIN OF FIRST PAGE] on September 10, 1913

Between the pillars of the portico of the House of Parliament.[126] Waiting for my director. Heavy rain. In front of me Athene Parthenos with helmet of gold.

September 6. Journey to Vienna. Inane literary gossip with Pick. Considerable antipathy. Thus (like P.) one hangs on to the globe of literature and cannot break away because one has dug in one's fingernails, but the rest of oneself is free, and one's legs keep kicking helplessly about. His nose-blowing tricks. He tyrannizes me by maintaining that it is I who tyrannize him.—The observer in the corner.—Heiligenstadt[127] station, deserted with deserted trains. In the distance a man examining the timetable posted on a wall. (I am now sitting on the steps of a statue by one Theophil Hansen.) Bent, wearing an overcoat, his face merging into the yellow timetable. Passing a small terraced inn. A customer's raised arm. Vienna. Ridiculous uncertainties, all of which I finally respect. Hotel Matschakerhof. 2 rooms with one entrance. Choose the front one. Intolerable noise. Must go out again with P. Am told I walk too fast, walk even faster. Breezy air. Recognize everything I had forgotten. Sleep badly. Full of worries. A horrible dream.[e] (The question of the diary is at the same time the question of the whole, contains all impossibilities pertaining to the whole. Considered this in the train during my conversation with P. It is impossible to say everything, and it is impossible not to say everything. Impossible to preserve one's freedom, impossible not to preserve it. Impossible to lead the only possible kind of life, i.e., to live together, each one to be free, each one for himself, not to be married, neither outwardly nor actually, simply to be together and by so doing to have taken the last possible step beyond the friendship between men, right up to the limit set for myself where one foot is already raised. But after all, this too is impossible. I thought of it as a way out, suddenly one morning last week; and meant to write it in the afternoon. That afternoon I received a biography of Grillparzer. He did it, that very thing. [At this moment there is a gentleman examining Theophil Hansen, I am sitting there like his Clio.] But what an intolerable, wicked, repulsive life it was, and yet just about what I could manage, though with far greater suffering—since, in certain ways, I am much weaker. Return[f] to this *later.*) Met Lise Weltsch[128] this evening.

September 7. Antipathy toward P. On the whole a very decent man. Has always had an unpleasant little gap in his character, and out of this very gap—now that one is constantly on hand to see—he creeps out in his entirety. Morning in Parliament. Before this, collected tickets for Zionist Congress from Lise W. at the Residenz Café. To Ehrenstein's.[129] Ottakring.[130] Can't make much of his poems. (Am very uneasy, hence also a little insincere, because I'm not writing this for myself alone.) With both of them to the Thalisia.[131] With them and Lise W. in the Prater.[132] Pity and boredom. She is coming to Berlin, to the Zionist office. Complains about her family's sentimentality, yet merely wriggles like a snake that has been pinned down. Nothing one can do for her. Sympathy with this kind of girl (via myself in some roundabout way) is perhaps the strongest social sentiment I possess. Photographs, shooting gallery, "A-Day-in-the-Jungle" merry-go-round (how helplessly she sits up there, her billowing dress well made, atrociously worn). At the Prater Café with her father. Gondola pond. Incessant headaches. The W.'s off to *Monna Vanna*.[133] Spend 10 hours in bed, sleep 5. Refuse the theater ticket.

[September] 8. Zionist Congress. Types with small round heads, firm cheeks. The workers' delegate from Palestine, permanent uproar. Herzl's daughter. The former director of the Gymnasium in Jaffa. On the stairs, erect, scruffy beard, coat. Fruitless German speeches, much Hebrew, most work done in small committees. Lise W. is merely dragged along by the whole thing without participating, tosses paper balls into the hall, hopeless. Frau Thein.[134]

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Venice, September 15, 1913]

Venice at last. But now I will have to throw myself into it wholeheartedly, despite the pouring rain (the more thoroughly will my days in Vienna be washed away) and the trembling in my head,

the result of slight seasickness on that absurdly short crossing [Trieste—Venice], but in a gale.

Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Hotel Sandwirth, Venice. POSTMARK: September 16, 1913]

Felice, your letter is neither an answer to my last letters, nor is it in accordance with our agreement. I won't reproach you for it; after all, the same applies to my letters. We had meant to meet somewhere on my return, in order, wretched as we are, to try and draw some strength from each other. Do you still not realize, Felice, how matters stand with me? In the miserable state I am in, how can I possibly write to your father? Imprisoned by inhibitions with which you are familiar, I am unable to move, I am utterly, but utterly incapable of suppressing the inner obstacles; the only thing I am still just capable of is to be immensely unhappy about it. I could write to your father in a fashion of which you would thoroughly approve, and entirely from my heart, but at the faintest approach to the faintest reality, I would inevitably be beside myself again, and quite ruthlessly, under an irresistible compulsion, I would try to regain my independence. That could only lead to even deeper misery than we have so far experienced, Felice. I am here alone, talk to hardly a soul except the hotel staff, am overflowing with unhappiness, and yet I think I feel this condition to be appropriate to myself, assigned to me by some superhuman justice, a condition not to be transgressed but borne by me to the end of my days. What hinders me is not having to "give up too much of myself"—though, in a limited sense, this may be true—it is rather that I am prostrate, like an animal that one cannot get at (not even I) either by coaxing or by persuasion, although I cannot quite resist either, least of all the latter. But I am unable to go forward, it is as though I were ensnared; when I jerk myself forward, I am jerked back with renewed force. That is the one clear and honest statement that can be expected of me at the moment. While gazing at the clear

Venetian sky from my bed this morning with these thoughts passing through my head, I was ashamed and unhappy enough. But what am I to do, Felice? We shall have to part.

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Verona, September 20, 1913]

In the Church of Sant' Anastasia in Verona, where I am sitting wearily in a pew. Opposite stands a life-size marble dwarf who, with a blissful expression on his face, is supporting a holy-water basin.—I am entirely cut off from all mail, won't get any until the day after tomorrow in Riva, which makes me feel as though I were on some other planet; but otherwise I'm here in all my misery.

F.

[POSTMARK: Prague, October 29, 1913]

Let me try, not only for you, Felice, but also for myself to arrive at the limits of possible understanding.

When I wrote to you from Venice I didn't know for certain that it would be the last letter of what had been until then an uninterrupted series. But when this turned out to be the case (the postcard from Verona was not a postcard but a collapse), I thought it the wisest thing I had done for a long time. It was made easier for me by the fact that I heard nothing from you. The last communication from you was the telegram to Venice heralding a letter that never came. I did not think it improbable that subsequently you had written to Venice, but that the letter never reached me; for the Italian post office clerk flung the scrap of paper on which he had got me to write my Riva address into a corner in such a way that it is unlikely ever to have reappeared. All the same, I did not write. No, I did write once more, the very day after the postcard from Verona; I was at Desenzano[135] at the time, lying in the grass waiting for the steamer that was to take me to Gardone,[136]

and I wrote to you. I didn't mail the letter, I may still have it somewhere,[137] but don't ask to see it; it was pieced together, I even had to invent the conjunctions, it was frightful; that day at Desenzano I had really come to the end.

But by this time, Felice, you had received my notes from Vienna and my letter from Venice, and you didn't think it was the wisest thing? The only possible thing? That I simply *had to* tear myself away, unless you were going to reject me? You didn't think so? Don't think so even now? But how can you combine these impossibilities: How can I take my place in a new family, and then establish a family of my own, I who am rooted so loosely into my own family that I feel I don't touch anyone on any side? I who perhaps can share the pleasures but never the life of others, no matter how I try? I who wouldn't dare to be continually truthful in my life with another, yet could not bear a life together without truth? As you see, I could not show you my diary; in fact, apart from the pages I sent you, I didn't write another word. For me, living together permanently without lies is as impossible as it is without truth. The first glance I should cast upon your parents would be a lie.

But this is not all that's going on inside me. My longing for you is such that it presses on my breast like tears that cannot be wept. (No pains in the head, however, no palpitations; merely moderate, not complete insomnia—this won't start again until today.) In the seminar yesterday I stared at a girl[138] for an hour because she bore a faint resemblance to you. For weeks past I have been making plans for Christmas, in an effort to scrape together the sum total of happiness at the last moment. No, whenever I come up against reality I am fated to be struck with such force that I am brought to my senses. But if you were to ask me now what makes me tell you of these plans, so contrary to my convictions, about all I could say would be: "It is sheer villainy. At a certain depth, though not at the deepest, there is nothing I want more than to be swept toward you; and the fact that I say so is also villainy."

You, Felice, are not in any way to blame for the despair we are in, the blame is mine alone. You may not even be fully aware to what

extent it is mine. If you think it over, your letters of the past few months were essentially (omitting the pain) an expression of amazement that a man such as I could possibly exist. You could not believe it to be true. This you cannot deny. Were it not so, you couldn't have said that your mother's love for you would be transferred to me, you couldn't have described your parents' deliberations ending with the sentence: "so it remains only a love-match"; you couldn't have associated our engagement with the holidays. And yet that's how I am, you must believe it.

Franz

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*["UNUSUALLY PALE" CROSSED OUT. BETWEEN THE LINES] This is just coquetry, I look exactly as I always do and as I did last August.

†[IN THE MARGIN] Here it is after all, the remark: Didn't you wake up in a cold sweat?

‡ [IN A FRAME] 12:30 at night.

§[BETWEEN THE LINES] (My reply in parentheses: Because there was no news today.)

‖[IN THE LOWER MARGIN] not alleys, but streets[77]

a[BETWEEN THE LINES] After the letter you received on Thursday, it would only stand to reason. What else can I expect?

b[BETWEEN THE LINES] No, your express letter has just arrived. Dearest, to you who did not understand, nor could have understood that letter, my fears must seem idiotic; but they are horribly well-founded fears.

cThursday [CROSSED OUT].

d[BETWEEN THE LINES] had I slept as much as I thought about you, it would have been a lot

e[ADDED BELOW "DREAM"] (Malek)

f[ADDED ABOVE "RETURN"] dream

***Grete Bloch.*** The following is the first letter in this correspondence to be addressed to her. She was born in Berlin on March 21, 1892, and went to school there, then graduated from the Commercial Academy, which completed her education. From 1908 to 1915 she worked as a shorthand-typist in Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, and Vienna. From 1915 she worked first as secretary, subsequently as executive secretary, with a Berlin firm making office machines. She had one brother, Hans Bloch, a year older than herself. He is mentioned several times in the following correspondence.

Grete Bloch and Felice Bauer met probably in April 1913. Their friendship lasted a great deal longer than their relationship with Kafka. As late as 1935 Grete Bloch, as a refugee on her way to Palestine and finally to Italy, visited her friend who at that time was living with her family in Geneva. It was then that she handed over to Felice some of the letters she had received from Kafka.

Kafka met Grete Bloch for the first time at the end of October 1913 when, at Felice's request, she went to see him in Prague to act as intermediary between them. This meeting started a correspondence which lasted a year. The following represents all that has survived. In the third revised edition of his biography of Kafka (English edition, p. 241), Max Brod published part of a letter from Grete Bloch to a friend in Palestine; this was written on April 21, 1940, from Florence, where she was then living. In it she says that years ago she had had an illegitimate child, a son who "when nearly seven years old died suddenly in Munich in 1921." If this is correct, the child must have been born about 1914. Although the father's name is not mentioned in the letter, it was clear to the recipient, Max Brod's sole informant on the subject, that she attributed the paternity to Kafka.

Neither the content nor the tone of the following letters from Kafka to Grete Bloch, dating from October 29, 1913, to October 15, 1914, suggests that the relationship between them was such that a child born in 1914 or early 1915 would have been his, or indeed

that during this time she had a child at all. Moreover, exile friends of Grete Bloch's in Florence, to whom she told the story for the first time at about the date of her letter to Palestine, received it even then with incredulity. Also, the fact that Kafka went on a trip on May 24, 1915, to the countryside near Dresden (the "Sächsische Schweiz") with both Felice Bauer and Grete Bloch (a postcard of that date addressed to Kafka's sister Ottla and signed by the three of them was in the editors' hands) makes it seem very doubtful that the engaged couple's friend had only recently had, or was about to have, a child by Kafka. In the middle of 1916, at a time when neither the 1940 letter from Florence nor any other correspondence points to an intimate relationship between Kafka and Grete Bloch, Felice must have told him that Grete Bloch found herself in difficulties. A remark in the margin of Kafka's letter to Felice of August 31, 1916, reads: "How does Frl. Bloch bear it, and what does it mean to her?" And in his letter of September 1, 1916, he writes: "I am deeply disturbed by Fräulein Grete's suffering; I am sure you won't desert her now as, inconceivably, you have done sometimes in the past.… By being kind to her, you are acting on my behalf as well."

The guess that Grete Bloch's suffering at that time was due to her being pregnant is, of course, justified only in connection with her later Florence statements. But quite apart from the discrepancy of the dates, it is highly unlikely that Kafka, as the possible father of the child, should have mentioned the unmarried mother's situation so casually.

According to the British Red Cross, Grete Bloch, together with other Jews, was arrested after Hitler's occupation of Italy. She died presumably in a concentration camp.

*To Grete Bloch*

[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

October 29, 1913

Dear Fräulein Bloch,

Thank you for your invitation, of course I shall come, name a time that suits you and leave a message for me with the porter which I will collect sometime tomorrow.

One thing, however, I mustn't keep from you even now: there were times when I should have been happy to meet you; but I now realize that no discussion has ever helped me to clarify matters; if anything, it has confused me. And as I am sure you realize, there is confusion enough within me.

Yours respectfully, Dr. F. Kafka

November 6, 1913

Well, I'll be coming on Saturday, Felice, leaving here at 3 P.M., and will have to leave Berlin on Sunday between 4 and 5. I will be staying at the Askanische Hof.

I do realize that it is absolutely essential for us to meet. Originally, I had not meant to come until Christmas, but when your letter and your girl friend [Grete Bloch] arrived I decided to come this Saturday; and then, when your friend left and I had no letter from you, and minor obstacles arose, I intended to postpone my journey until two weeks from Saturday (Max is going to Berlin a week from Saturday, and I wanted to go alone). But owing to the discoveries I have made about myself during this past week—I feel utterly futile—and now that I have your letter, I am coming on Saturday. Should something suddenly prevent me, I'll send a telegram.

Have you any real hope, Felice, that our meeting will make things clear to us? I agree that it is absolutely essential, but will it in fact make things clear? No matter where I am, things are not clear. Don't you remember that after each meeting you have felt more doubtful than ever? That it was only in letters that all doubts were resolved, in letters comprising the better part of my self?

Well, we'll see, and let heaven look upon us with understanding.

Franz

I found the two slips of paper from Desenzano, they are enclosed. Do you know that since last winter I have not written a single line that can be allowed to survive?

*The two enclosed slips of paper*:
Desenzano, on Lake Garda, Sunday [September 21, 1913] in the grass, in front of me the ripples in the reeds; my view is bordered by the peninsula of Sirmione on the right, on the left by the banks of the lake as far as Manerba; sunny, nearby two workmen have just stretched out in the grass.

The fact that no one knows where I am is my only happiness. If only I could prolong this forever! It would be far more just than death. I am empty and futile in every corner of my being, even in my unhappiness. Now for an island, with nobody on it, instead of the sanatorium.[139]

These complaints, however, do not relieve me; I remain entirely unmoved, am like a great stone at the very center of which there flickers a tiny soul. Today I dreamt about you and your father, I might be able to remember the details, but don't want to think about it. One thing I know—that as I reached the door I answered him: "But perhaps it is only that I am ill."

I don't keep a diary at all, I wouldn't know what for; nothing happens to me to stir my inmost self. This applies even if I weep, as I did yesterday in a cinematographic theater in Verona. I am capable of enjoying human relationships, but not experiencing them. This I can verify again and again: yesterday at a fiesta in Verona, before that with the honeymoon couples in Venice.

*To Grete Bloch*

November 10, 1913

Dear Fräulein Bloch,

I returned from Berlin last night, I am writing to you before writing to F. This trip was largely your doing, and you were responsible; I can thank you only by telling you about it.

But first I should like to confess something, not because this confession gives me pleasure, but because it would be pointless to write without complete honesty, or as near as one can get to it.

When I got your letter from Aussig I looked forward to meeting you, though I was disconcerted by a surprise letter from F. that arrived at the same time. In any case it means that my first letter was not entirely honest. I was expecting to meet (after all, I knew nothing about you except that you were efficient) an elderly spinster with maternal feelings who, moreover—I don't quite know why—would be tall and strong. To this kind of girl, I thought, one might really be able to confess everything, which in itself would be a blessing, and perhaps one might get some good advice (the belief that an adult is capable of receiving good advice is one of my greatest stupidities), and if not advice, then perhaps comfort, and if not comfort, then at least news of F. But then you arrived and were a slim, young, undoubtedly rather unusual girl. I had spent 2 hours at home carefully preparing all I had to say on the main issue, but when it came to talking—apart from the fact that I am quite incapable of talking—all I managed to utter were some miserable fragments which partly you ignored, and partly and justifiably considered irrelevant. Yet even during that conversation I had the feeling of having said too much, and this feeling increased to such an extent on my way home and at home that I was filled with rage and despair at myself. I imagined that in addition to having wronged F. so deeply already, I had betrayed her as well. I told myself that you couldn't be her intimate friend; and that, preoccupied with my prepared confession, I had not adequately tested you. How could you possibly be a close friend of F.? From her letters I had heard practically nothing about you; and you yourself had said that you have known her only nine months; later it turned out to be only six months. At first you looked for the cause of our unhappiness in entirely the wrong place; then you went on to tell me in great detail about the trouble F. has with her teeth, and to me tooth trouble (something you couldn't have known, but I didn't bother to tell you that night) is among the most repulsive ailments, which I can overlook only in people most dear to me, and then only

just; you told me about the breaking-off of F.'s brother's engagement, thereby bringing the entire family, who frighten me in every way and whom I would prefer to forget, most vividly to life—in short, I was a fool, I completely misinterpreted everything and decided—my foolishness was at least logical—not to come again the following evening, and to announce it in a letter in which—— it's late again, I won't be able to finish today and mail the letter in the morning, and you may be angry with me for not having answered your letter, the obvious kindness of which is broken only by the unintelligible passage about the roses (be sorry for? What do you mean by that? Actually, it's true in one sense, I am sorry for all girls, it's the only incontestable social sentiment I possess. Where this compassion springs from, I am still not quite clear. Perhaps I am sorry for girls on account of the transformation into women which they have to undergo. In that case, however, my compassion—if that's what it is—would be a very girlish sentiment).

In my letter—I continue with my confession—I meant to explain that everything I said that evening was wrong, merely idle words due to my clumsiness and its closely related dishonesty, that it had merely confused your original correct opinion and if it were to be repeated the following evening (which would definitely be the case) would be bound to confuse it further. For this reason I definitely had to deny myself the meeting.

I had already started the letter, perhaps even written the first lines, but abandoned it and went to see you. Whatever the consequences may have been or will be, it is certain that for one night and one day I did you a hideous and above all unnecessary injustice.

And now I shall tell you about Berlin. My serious decisions are serious only insofar as I am tremendously tormented if I don't carry them out. On the other hand, it so happens that very often I don't carry them out. I don't think I would have gone on Saturday but for a letter from F. in which I was reminded of the promise I had made to you. But then I went, and gladly.

And then something happened which invariably happens whenever I go to Berlin and which, intentionally or unintentionally, I forget prior to every departure. I must preface this by saying that I really know F. as 4 almost incompatible girls, each almost equally dear to me. The first is the one who was in Prague, the second is the one who writes letters to me (in herself she is manifold, yet consistent), the third is the one I meet in Berlin, and the fourth the one who consorts with people unknown to me, and of her I hear in letters or from her own accounts. Well, the third has no great liking for me. Nothing is more natural, I regard it as the most natural thing. I tell myself as much, and with horror, every time I leave Berlin; but this time with the additional feeling of how well deserved it is. It is F.'s good angel who leads her, who leads her so very close, and perhaps not even very close, past me.

I meant to write more about this; I am afraid I'm going off at a tangent, the time has come to tell you briefly what happened. On Friday F. got my letter announcing my arrival on Saturday at 10:30 P.M. I didn't receive any confirmation. I was afraid my letter might not have arrived, wanted to send a telegram, but finally hoped I might at least find a word of greeting at the hotel that evening. Had I not even the right to hope to see her at the station? Remember, I had to leave again on Sunday at 4:30, and even if I intended to stay till midnight, travel all night, and hurry straight from the train to my office, my stay would still be one of lamentably few hours. But no one was at the station, and there was nothing at the hotel. So my letter had certainly gone astray, and that was very bad. Nevertheless, in the morning I waited until 8:30, and since it was impossible to wait any longer I sent a messenger on a bicycle. He came back at 9 with a letter in which F. wrote to say she would telephone me in a quarter of an hour; she telephoned at about 10 o'clock. You realize that none of these observations would be worth mentioning but for what followed. We went for a walk in the Tiergarten. I am telling you only those things that support my argument. F. had to go to a funeral that was to take place at 12, we tore along and arrived on time; the last I saw of F. through the

automobile window was her passing through the cemetery gate with two male acquaintances and disappearing in the crowd. Why I was such a fool as not to join her occurs to me only now. She suggested that she would telephone me at 3 and come to the station, but that I should leave at 4:30 since she couldn't promise to be free in the evening; at any rate, at 6 she had to go to the station with her brother who was leaving for Brussels (incidentally, I was not told about the breaking-off of the engagement). I lunched, then hurried to my hotel intending to wait for the telephone call; but it was only 1 o'clock, the rain came down slowly but incessantly; I was somewhat depressed and drove to Schöneberg to see a good friend[140] because I found sitting in the hotel really unbearable. At 2:45 I tore myself away from my friend, as I wanted to avoid the disaster of missing the call. Arriving punctually at 3, I found I had missed nothing, there had been no call for me. And now the waiting began. I sat in the hotel lobby and gazed at the rain, I went upstairs and flung my few things into my bag, I went down again and sat in a chair and the clock moved on until it was actually past 4 and I had to go to the station. F., of course, might still be at the station, but that would have been a miracle, and indeed it didn't happen. The rain might have prevented her from coming to the station, but no one could have prevented her from telephoning. So I left Berlin like one who had had no right to go there. And in a sense this is true.

But my words are becoming distorted, I am unable to write; when we met for the first time I was in such a wretched state that if it weren't for your immense vitality I wouldn't be able to understand how, after that kind of meeting, you could bear to be near me for more than 2 minutes. What is more, I cannot even judge whether this letter expresses base or decent sentiments, though needless to say I am much more inclined to feel and believe the former. But enough of this, it's nearly midnight.

Yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

[November 18, 1913]

Dear Fräulein Bloch, now I am robbing you of your nights, am conscious of your sympathy which exceeds both my imagination and my faculties, bask in it for days on end, yet fail to answer. I couldn't. Please understand me, this is not an excuse. Perhaps you didn't expect a reply from me, but *I* expected it; the moment I got your letter I wanted so much to say or do something that would be equivalent to kissing your hand, but I couldn't, nor can I today; if it doesn't happen at the right time I cannot strike a true word out of myself. By the way, I haven't written once to F. since my visit, nor have I heard from her. Isn't the latter rather strange?

But I won't go on. My behavior could never be as infamous in reality as it is in my letter. I am getting downright exhausted and, though my mind is clear and my body at peace, I can't go on writing. My idea of the person to whom I am writing is fading away, and I feel as though I am in a fog.

I shall continue tomorrow and not start afresh, for a few days ago I destroyed two almost equally self-confident opening paragraphs. But you must tell me explicitly that you don't mind my not answering at once, and that you don't even mind if my answer consists of nothing but a report of a state of mind hardly worth reporting.

Before going to bed, however, I shall record a dream I had last night to show you that at night I am somewhat more active than when awake. Listen: on a rising road, starting at the left as seen from below, about halfway up and mostly in the roadway, there lay a pile of rubbish or solidly packed clay which had crumbled lower and lower on the right, while on the left it rose as high as the palings of a fence. When skirting it on the right where the road was almost clear, I saw a man on a tricycle coming toward me from below and apparently making straight for the obstacle. He was a man who seemed to have no eyes, at least his eyes looked like holes that had been effaced. The tricycle was rickety, so that it progressed in a shaky, uncertain fashion, nevertheless silently, with almost

exaggerated quietness and ease. At the last moment I seized hold of the man, held him as though he were the handlebars of his vehicle, and steered the latter into the gap through which I had come. Whereupon the man slumped against me; I was as tall as a giant and in order to hold him I had to stand in an awkward position; the vehicle, moreover, as though riderless, began to run backwards, and though slowly, it dragged me after it. We passed a farm cart on which stood a number of people huddled together, all somberly dressed, among them a boy scout wearing a light gray hat with a turned-up brim. From this boy, whom I had recognized from some way off, I expected help, but he turned and squeezed himself in among the people. Then from behind the cart—the tricycle meanwhile kept rolling on and I, bent double and with my legs astraddle, had to follow—there came toward me someone who brought me help, but who he was I can no longer remember.——

This is how I help men on tricycles at night.

First of all, dear Fräulein Bloch, there are two errors in your letter. I didn't feign interest when you told me about F.'s toothache and the breaking-off of her brother's engagement. Indeed, I was extremely interested, there was nothing I would rather have listened to; for my liking, you told me far too little about it; that's how I am, and surely that's not particularly remarkable; the abscess under the bridge, the piecemeal breaking-off of the bridge, I should like to have heard all about that with every detail and even asked F. about it in Berlin. Don't you get pleasure out of exaggerating painful things as much as possible? For people with weak instincts it often seems to me the only way to drive out pain; like medicine, which is devoid of all good instincts, it cauterizes the sore spot. By so doing, of course, nothing definite is achieved, but the moment itself—and those with bad and weak instincts haven't time to worry about more than that—is almost pleasurable. Besides, other things may have contributed, anyway I wasn't feigning; on the contrary, I was particularly truthful on this occasion.

The second error concerns F.'s letters; not that you were misinformed about them. The last 6 months have in fact been spent in complaints on my part about the delay and deficiency of her letters, and not getting an adequate explanation, above all not getting an adequate explanation for the *difference between them and those of the first months.* In my inability to tolerate such a situation I feel like you, and no doubt I have written a pile of letters on the subject that verge on madness. And the worst of it is that again letters follow from both sides dealing exclusively with the writing of letters—empty, time-wasting letters, secretly no more than accounts of the torture it is, or rather can be, to carry on a correspondence. Essentially, however, it's not letters one wants, merely two words, not much more. One's craving for these letters, after all, is nothing but fear and apprehension.—So in this respect you were right; but there were new fears and apprehensions, and with me these are always so exclusive that I not only forget the old ones, but, even when reminded of them, can no longer imagine them.

Well, I shall now send you my kindest regards and mail this letter, however uncertain and confused it may be. Incidentally, this uncertainty, as you will realize, springs from a single source: that practically every word I put on paper—not merely those addressed to you—I promptly want to retract, or better still, obliterate.

Yours, F. Kafka

You tell me your activities in Vienna are successful. What do these successes consist of? Does it mean you have got used to Vienna? Have you a pleasant room? I ask because I myself have just moved[141] and notice once again how I instantly get used to new rooms, which merely proves that I had no feeling for the old ones, however much I always think I have. I also have a lovely view which, if your memory is equal to your good sense of topography, you may roughly be able to imagine. Immediately opposite my window on the 4th or 5th floor is the great dome of the Russian church with its two towers, and between the dome and the neighboring apartment house a

distant view of a triangular section of the Laurenziberg with a tiny church. On my left I can see the Town Hall with its massive tower rising sharply and foreshortened in a perspective that perhaps no one has ever truly observed.

But now I really mustn't forget to tell you, as a sister, that Max Brod has just been to Berlin and greatly praised your brother's efficiency.[142] What kind of work does he do? He leaves the house at 7 in the morning and doesn't get back until the evening? And where did he get his scars?

*Draft of a letter to Grete Bloch*

December 15/16, 1913

The main reason, Fräulein Grete, for my not having written before, the reason for my inhibition even in my earlier letters, was the thought that whatever I intended to write I invariably found myself trying, first to spy on F., even if only to find out what she is doing at the moment, secondly that I was doing you an injustice, perhaps, by believing myself incapable of resisting the temptation to ask you questions and so forcing you to reluctant replies, and, thirdly, that I was appearing to write merely to ask these questions. Now, however, none of these considerations can prevent me, for it is becoming I won't say "incomprehensible," but worrying that I can't find out anything about F., so worrying that I am writing. Do you know anything about F.? Could she be ill? But from your last letter (I'm dismayed when I look at it, it's nearly 3 weeks old) I see that you were still getting postcards from F. toward the end of November, when there was no mention of illness. But even without these indications, illness would not have occurred to me, this is not the cause of my anxiety. Indeed, the evening before your letter arrived I wrote a letter to F., mailed it the following morning—it must have been November 28th—moreover by registered mail. Two days later I discovered that Max's wife, who had seen F. in Berlin and invited her for Christmas, has now expressly repeated this invitation by letter. Last Sunday I sent F. another letter by express mail. Not one of these letters has been answered. Is this not, again I

won't say "completely," but largely contrary to her nature? By what circumstances, by what process of reasoning can this be explained? Do you know anything about it, and would you tell me? If you can't tell me, I don't want pity to compel you (at the moment, for example, even the scrutiny of 1000 observers could find nothing pitiable about me; it's about 12:30 at night, and I'm sitting writing this letter in comfort, am absurdly calm, my feet wrapped in a rug and with a feeling of considerable well-being). If, however, you can't tell me, then say just that, so that I won't have to go on searching around in the dark.

December 29, 1913, afternoon [to January 2, 1914]

Four times within the last ten days, Felice, you have promised to write to me on the actual day of making these promises. You promised it once in writing, via Dr. Weiss, once on the telephone, twice by telegram; according to the last telegram, the letter had already been written and was to be mailed for certain the day the telegram was sent, i.e., last Sunday. Not one of these letters has reached me, so you told an untruth four times.[143]

Outwardly this appears to make no sense whatever. You realize that nothing anywhere around me is of the slightest importance compared to that promised letter. Which means you must also know that by not writing you are inflicting torments on me minute by minute—all the more so since periodically you make such definite promises. You also know that now, at any rate, it is no fault of mine, and that (I mention this here only for the sake of completeness; in itself it is unimportant and perhaps ridiculous) at the merest word from you I would write to your parents at once. And you even seem to deny to some extent that you are angry with me, and with each of your promises, in addition to the promise itself, you gave me a little hope. I repeat, outwardly and at first glance, this seems inhuman.

Yet I, who in no circumstances will let you go of my own free will, have an explanation for it. I believe you to be a thoroughly truthful girl, and believe you to be capable of these untruths only under the overwhelming pressure of necessity. You would dearly

like to comfort me, hence keep promising that you will write. And then in fact you really try, but find you simply can't, either for practical or personal reasons. Since you are also an independent girl, the reasons are probably personal ones; which is worse for me.

Thus I provide the answers in your place. And now I ask you to write and tell me only whether my own replies are true. You must not answer this by telegram, but write; to be convinced, and understand it properly, I want to see your writing. I beg you, however, to send it express and to the apartment, so that I get the letter on New Year's morning, for, believe me, I can't get it quickly enough. If, beyond a simple "Yes" or "No," you feel like adding anything in explanation, that would be pure kindness on your part; but should these explanations present even the slightest difficulties, or delay the letter by even the briefest period of time, then I beg you not to explain anything. I am simply asking, you see, for a short, effortless, noncommittal letter. In it, do not call me dear, if this is not what I am to you, do not send me sincere wishes if this is not what you mean. Just a very brief letter. This is not an immoderate request.

If I get that letter I promise, in response, to keep quiet, not to bother you in any way; in fact—even should there be no hope—merely to wait for you.

Franz

December 29, 1913, evening

Having written the enclosed letter, I went to lie down for a while (I had hardly slept the night before; this is by no means a reproach, I usually sleep very badly anyway), and then meant to go to the office, where I have a lot of work to do. Then in the evening I meant to call on Dr. Weiss, who is in Prague at the moment and wanted me to go with him to a theater on the outskirts. However, we won't get to the theater, since it is now 7 o'clock and I am sitting here, writing. Your letter arrived at about 5, I hadn't gone to sleep yet. Had I not been in bed I should have answered it at once; now I am

glad that I didn't and instead stayed in bed for about 2 hours thinking, not about myself, for I am through with myself, but about you.

I see from your letter that my request for a letter caused you a great deal of suffering, not as much as your not writing caused me, but still a great deal. Perhaps the reason why you were unable to write to me was that you tried to write a letter in which the following paragraph would not occur: "Marriage would mean that we should each have to sacrifice a good deal; let us not try to establish where the excess weight would be. It is a good deal, for each of us." But you did not succeed in writing that kind of letter. Nevertheless that paragraph is terrible, and would be almost unbearable if in fact it was meant to be as calculating as it appears. And yet I believe it is a good thing that it was written, a good thing even for our reconciliation, though I can see no steps that would lead from that paragraph to a reconciliation, for, as long as one calculates, one cannot climb. However, that is only my first opinion; for you are quite right, one has to calculate, unless to calculate would be not wrong, but futile and impossible. And this is my final opinion.

You misunderstood if you imagined that what keeps me from marrying is the thought that in winning you I would gain less than I would lose by giving up my solitary existence. I know you think this; orally you expressed yourself in this way, and I contradicted, but, as I see, not vehemently enough. For me it was not a matter of giving something up, for even after marriage I would go on being the very same person I am, and this precisely—if you so chose—is the serious problem that would confront you. What prevented me was the imagined feeling that complete isolation meant an obligation for me, not a gain, not a pleasure (at least not in the sense you imagine), but duty and suffering. I don't believe in it any more; it was pure fabrication (perhaps this knowledge will help me to go on), and is most easily disproved by the fact that I cannot live without you. Just you, just as you are, including that terrible paragraph in your letter, that's the way I want you. And yet not for

the sake of finding solace, nor for my own gratification, but so that you should live with me here as an independent human being.

I had not reached this point when I wrote to your parents. A vast number of fabrications, accumulated in the course of the year, kept going through my head in a positively deafening fashion. I brought it to an end in my letter from Venice; I simply could not bear the clamor in my head any longer.

I think I must now be completely truthful and tell you something that no one in fact has so far heard from me. At the sanatorium I fell in love with a girl, a child, about 18 years old; she is Swiss, but lives in Italy, near Genoa, thus by blood as alien to me as can be; still immature but remarkable and despite her illness a real person with great depth.[144] A girl far less remarkable than she could have captivated me at that time in my empty, hopeless state; you've got my notes from Desenzano, they were written about 10 days before. It was as clear to me as it was to her that we did not really belong together, and that once the 10 days available to us had expired everything would have to end, and that no letters, not a single line would be exchanged. Nevertheless, we meant a great deal to each other, and I had to make all kinds of arrangements to prevent her bursting into tears in front of everyone when we said goodbye, and I felt much the same. With my departure it was all over.

Paradoxical as it may seem, even this helped to make my feelings about you clearer to me. Besides, the Italian girl knew about you, also knew that fundamentally my sole aim was to marry you. Then I returned to Prague, found myself completely out of touch with you, lost more and more courage, but did think of possibly coming to Berlin at Christmas and trying to reach a decision.

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January 1, 1914

First of all, a happy New Year to you, Felice, and, should you want it, to us both. Answering your letter is not, after all, as easy as I thought. That one paragraph stands out so conspicuously and is lighted from so many different angles; to make it disappear

altogether seems almost impossible. This is why I meant to write only if I had time and peace, but yesterday I had neither, and today it's pretty much the same; I am tired, and Felix and Oskar are coming to fetch me in a quarter of an hour. However, to be in contact with you, I shall write a little, for it does me good, momentarily makes me almost happy, though at this particular moment, 3:15 P.M., God knows where you may be and God knows what you may be thinking—thoughts quite unconnected with me, never to be connected with me. Nevertheless, the fact that my reply is so much delayed doesn't worry me in the least, because your waiting for my letters and my waiting for your letters are in no way comparable, I may even be doing you a favor by delaying.

This is the first time (but you know this, so I shouldn't really have to tell you) you talk of losses that you would suffer (and this has to be emphasized) not only as a result of your leaving Berlin, but even more from marrying me. You talk, moreover, not merely of the possibility of such losses, but of their certainty. Ultimately your description shows there is an "excess weight" as well, and, by the manner of the reference, it would probably have to be to your disadvantage.

This, after all, is just what I have been trying to convince you of for an entire year. If it were the result of my efforts, I could be satisfied. But in this case it should have been more gradual, not so sudden. But it may have developed during the time of not writing, in which case it was gradual after all and I was simply unaware of its growth. But this surely contradicts what you said that last Sunday [November 9, 1913] in Berlin; it is also contrary to your entire point of view, according to which—regardless of whether I and life with me could mean for you something worth while—you would leave behind in Berlin nothing that had any deep, telling, or vital significance for you. But perhaps you have been mistaken about this too, and only recently have become more aware of your assets. Perhaps I have helped you to achieve this—not by words, but by my very existence. It's possible. I have sometimes had the impression that what you possess in Berlin is indispensable to you.

Trivial incidents in your behavior toward me could, if carefully examined, be accepted as proof. And finally, I can still hear ringing in my ears what you

January 1, 1914, midnight

told Max's wife in Berlin—that your work and life there mean a great deal to you, and that your director had warned you not to leave Berlin without giving it very careful thought. (The fact that you repeated this to a stranger, a woman you had known only for a few hours, seemed almost as bad as if you had positively agreed with your director.)

But apart from this, Felice, I have to admit that you are right. Taking a detached view, you are bound to lose. You stand to lose Berlin, your office, the work you enjoy, a life almost free from worry, that particular kind of independence, that convivial companionship with people you get on with, life with your family—and these are but the losses I am aware of. Instead you would be coming to Prague, to a provincial town with a language unfamiliar to you, into an official's, moreover not even a fully fledged official's, inevitably petty-bourgeois household, you would not be short of worries; though you would continue to be independent, you would nevertheless not be unencumbered; and instead of social life and instead of your family you would have a husband who, more often than not (now at any rate more often than not) is melancholy and silent, and whose infrequent personal happiness lies solely in an occupation that, as an occupation, would inevitably continue to be alien to you. And these are things that possibly (I am not sure if I may mention this here) love alone could help one to surmount.

As I said, there certainly is an error in your theory of an excess weight. On my part it was never a question of "loss," there was merely an "obstacle," and this obstacle no longer exists. What's more, I venture to say that I love you so much that I should have wanted to marry you even if you had made it perfectly clear that you had but a faint liking for me, and even this not free from doubt. It would be wrong and underhanded to exploit your compassion in

this way, but I wouldn't be able to refrain. On the other hand, I admit it is not possible to get married provided and so long as you are aware of and able to foresee the losses with as much perspicacity as one may conclude from your letter. To enter upon marriage with a conscious sense of loss—this I admit is not possible, and I would not allow it to happen even if you wanted it, because, in the only kind of marriage I want, husband and wife, in the very essence of their being, must be equals in order to exist independently within this unit—which in that case would be impossible.

January 2, 1914

But, Felice, is this really your serious belief, are you really afraid of losing something? Do you really treat yourself with such solicitude? No, you most certainly don't. To be explicit, there would seem to be only two possibilities: either you don't wish to have anything to do with me and this is your method of trying to push me aside, or it is merely that your confidence in me has been somewhat shaken and you are doing the weighing for that reason alone. In the event of the former, there is nothing I can do to prevent it and nothing I can say: in that case it is all over; I have lost you, and will have to see how I can go on living, in the certain knowledge that I will never quite get over it. In the event of the latter, however, nothing is lost; in that case everything between us is bound to turn out well, for I know that were you to put your confidence in me to the test, I would pass it absolutely, no matter how weak I might be at any particular moment.

So it is up to you, Felice, to say how matters stand. If it is the former, then we must surely part; if the latter, then put me to the test; I cannot believe in the third possibility—that without deeper reason you merely calculate the losses.

We had actually agreed to abandon the idea of marriage, and to go on writing to each other as in the past. It was your suggestion, and I acquiesced since I could think of nothing better. Now I know what's better, let's do it! Marriage is the only means whereby the

relationship between us—so very necessary to me—can be maintained. I too consider our not living in the same city to be an advantage, but for one reason only: if we were to get married, our marriage would be more likely to take place later than if we were separated, as we are now. Doubts would appear, opportunities for delay would be found, and unhappy days would pass to no avail. Indeed they do so now in great abundance.

But you don't take the continuation of our correspondence quite seriously, either. What would it lead to? Torments of waiting and chronicles of complaints. That would be all. Thus slowly it would disintegrate, and the eventual pain would be far greater and more poisonous. This we won't do; it would be beyond our capacity and do no one any good. Just note the effect of time on our relationship wholly confined to writing; hardly two months have passed since you last wrote to me, and already in certain places, without your realizing it, little animosities are beginning to creep into your letter. No, Felice, we cannot go on living in this way.

I love you, Felice, with everything that is good in me as a human being, with everything in me that makes me deserving of being astir among the living. If it isn't much, then I am not much. I love you just as you are, the parts of you I approve of, as well as those I do not approve of, everything, everything. You don't feel this way, even if everything else were all right. You are not satisfied with me, you object to various things about me, want me to be other than I am. I should "live more in the real world," should "take things as I find them," etc. Don't you realize that if in fact it is an inner necessity for you to want this, then you no longer want me, but are trying to get past me. Why try to change people, Felice? It is not right. One has either to take people as they are, or leave them as they are. One cannot change them, one can merely disturb their balance. A human being, after all, is not made up of single pieces, from which a single piece can be taken out and replaced by something else. Rather he is a whole, and if you pull one end, the other, whether you like it or not, begins to twitch. However, Felice —even the fact that you object to various things about me and want

to change them, I love even that; but what I want is for you to know it.

And now decide, Felice! Your last letter is not a definite decision, it still contains some question marks. You have always seen yourself more clearly than I see myself. In this respect you must not now be inferior to me.

And finally I kiss the hand that drops this letter.

Franz

*To Grete Bloch*

January 23, 1914[1]

Dear Fräulein Bloch,

A pity I couldn't talk to you when you were in Prague. I can't imagine why I wasn't called to the telephone when you rang me. But perhaps there was something wrong with the line. Anyway, the remark that "I couldn't be induced to answer the telephone" is incorrect; I not only could have been induced, I would actually have dashed to it. Rather, let us say that you were not overanxious to talk to me, and that indeed is the most understandable explanation.

Don't be offended by my failure to write; actually it wasn't a failure. Though your last letter but one, or rather the one before that, was very friendly, I couldn't answer it. Oversensitive as I am about everything concerning F., I sensed something bitter in the letter, something almost hostile—despite all its (not merely outward) kindness. I only sensed it, I didn't actually believe it; I was already too unjust to you in Prague to believe a thing of that sort now. Nevertheless, I couldn't have answered without insincerity; indeed, I even wrote that insincere letter, carried it around in my pocket for 2 days, and when at that point your last letter but one arrived, I was glad I hadn't mailed mine. These are undoubtedly loathsome subterfuges on my part. Nor is it really like me, I am hardly ever suspicious, I know how to appreciate the least kindness, have received nothing but kindness from you, kindness bestowed in a most unselfish way—there is no explanation for my feeling other

than that my relationship with F.—unbearable, uncertain, yet forever piercingly vivid—puts me in an entirely false position with you, too. If I am to tell you frankly what made that letter unanswerable, it was—this was not the only reason, but the main one—that there was nothing in it about F., whereas in your earlier letters, at a time when you had no news of F., you invariably mentioned the fact. I don't mean to say that you wished to punish or torment me with this silence; no, of course that isn't what I mean to say, nevertheless for me it was both. Perhaps you really had no news of F., perhaps you wanted to be questioned—as far as I am concerned, these possibilities didn't change matters.

Today, however, a number of things have changed. In the unlikely case that you don't know (I assume you spent Christmas in Berlin), I can tell you, surely, since it isn't really F.'s secret: I have renewed my request for her hand (I am telling you very briefly, it went back and forth for weeks) and have received no, or virtually no, reply. I could understand F.'s behavior from my point of view, her silence I mean, her letting the uncertainty go on, but given her nature, as I imagined it to be, I don't understand it.

There is but one thing I ask (and I take your last unexpected letter as a favorable sign that, however little I deserve it, you will answer, moreover *very soon, for a particular reason, please, very soon*), how is F.? Well? Or is she suffering? Or both?

Yours, F. Kafka

*To Grete Bloch*

January 28, 1914

Dear Fräulein Bloch,

There is no explanation except that in anything concerning or connected with F. I am struck with a kind of blindness, made worse by my imagining that this is just where I see most clearly. When I think of my behavior toward you alone, again and again I deplore it, and then I start all over again. But I can't help it; all the aversion that my behavior can arouse in others I carry within me to the full,

and I have experienced all its extremes; but in this situation, infinitely more than in any other, I am involuntarily, as though by an unknown hand, twisted this way and that, to the point of dizziness.

But you know it too, for your letter, and this is what amazed me most, contains not a word of reproach, not even surprise at my asking F. yet again to marry me. I did it because there was no other way, I have no other explanation for it.

F.'s letter to you (for which I thank you very much, do let me keep it a little longer; needless to say F. won't hear about it) is kind and true and the facts, as far as I am concerned, are almost correct. It's true that the "pap" was "hot,"[2] and the bit about the "poor devil" is also true. But that F. hasn't written to you since is bad and almost sinister. I wouldn't know the dates of my letters to F., at least not exactly, if I hadn't put them in that letter I once wrote to you and never mailed, and which I happen to have found a moment ago.[3] The first time I wrote to F. after my visit to Berlin was on November 27—the same evening, strangely enough, on which F. wrote to you. I had no answer. Later I learned that Frau Brod wrote to F. at about the same time, inviting her for Christmas. She also had no answer. Then about a fortnight later I wrote another letter, again no answer. I don't remember the exact sequence of events after that; I must have written 2 more letters, and sent 2 telegrams. Since I never had a line in answer to these, either, I carried out the following somewhat dreamlike plan,[4] actually conceived when half-asleep. (I mention it mainly in order to excuse my sending you the *Galley*.[5])

I have a very good friend in Berlin, Dr. E. Weiss, the author of this *Galley*. I used to know him only slightly, his novel not at all; when I was in Berlin in November I spent about an hour with him, but since then, during the Christmas holidays (in Prague), I saw a lot of him. Well, early in December I asked this Dr. Weiss to take a letter from me to F.'s office. In the letter I said little more than that I had to have news from or about her, which was why I had sent W. so that he could write to me about her. While she read the letter, W. was to sit beside her desk, look around, wait until she had finished reading,

and then, since he had been given no further instructions and was most unlikely to get a reply (for why should *he* get one when *I* never did), he was to go away and let me know how she looked and how she seemed to be. And this was precisely what happened. W. was given a few lines for me in which F. promised to write at length that very day. This letter didn't arrive; *I* wrote a letter; in reply I received a telegram announcing a letter; that letter didn't arrive; I telephoned, again a letter was promised without fail and didn't arrive; I sent a telegram, received one in return, according to which the letter to me had been written and was ready for mailing. Yet it didn't arrive. I think I wrote again. It came at last. It contained little, and what it did contain was sad, specifically sad as well as sad in its overall vagueness. Thereupon I wrote a letter of some 40 pages[6] and for about 4 weeks have been, or rather am no longer, expecting a reply. To humiliate oneself more profoundly than I did in that letter is impossible; however, there is one page in the letter that is a kind of contradiction, a page written half-consciously, yet a true page, which might make it impossible to answer the letter as a whole. But it can't be that, for this page is so closely connected with the preceding and following ones that it can't be read by itself, and Felice, of all people, should not do so. But if she did, she couldn't have answered the letter even if it hadn't included that page.

This is more or less all that has happened. You spent Christmas in Vienna? Alone? I was convinced you would be going to Berlin, and equally convinced that I should be in Berlin. And I would have gone, if the only clear message I got from the telephone conversation hadn't been a request for me not to come to Berlin, a request moreover repeated later by telegram. When I begged you for a quick answer, I had the intention of going to Berlin on Sunday and if possible clearing up everything at one go. I shan't do it, not after that letter. I can't go without knowing what F. has been feeling lately. Yet without knowing, there is nothing further I can prove to F. beyond my last letter, I'm not strong enough. Thus we continue as before in silence, not peace.

Please, Fräulein Bloch, forgive me for my stupid lack of confidence as well as for my confidences. I almost feel like

apologizing for F. as well, for it really seems as though ever since F. and I stopped hurting each other directly, and (for my part) incessantly, we have turned to you not in order to complain, but to hurt you.

Show that you forgive me by kindly accepting the *Galley*. It is sent not merely in exchange for F.'s letter—the writings of friends in both cases—but it gives me special pleasure to send you, just you, this book of which I am very fond.

One more request: I think you know Erna Bauer, do you by any chance know her office address?

With kindest regards, yours, F. Kafka

*To Grete Bloch*

February 5, 1914

Dear Fräulein Bloch,

I reckon as follows: I mailed my letter to you on Sunday, it reached you at latest on Tuesday morning (Monday was a holiday), today is Thursday. In principle I wouldn't have the least occasion—let alone right—to remind you. Nor would I do so if I knew for certain that for some arbitrary reason you have not written, yet surely will write before long. But I do not feel this certainty, my frame of mind is very far removed from anything approaching certainty, which is why I must immediately consider two possibilities to account for your failure to write, possibilities that suggest themselves more readily because hitherto you have spoiled me with your prompt replies. The two possibilities are: either I have offended you or you have bad news for me. Both are more than likely, I am so absentminded and unsure of myself that I could well have perpetrated some absurd idiocy and offended you, and that there should be bad news for me is, if anything, even more likely. Yet neither the first nor the second is sufficient reason for not writing to me. On the contrary: whatever I may have written to offend you, it was but a superficial mistake, therefore easy to forgive; if you read my last letter again, you must agree, and if you

don’t agree then write and tell me so and it will be cleared up quite easily. But so far as bad news is concerned, surely you know that I have been waiting so long for news of any sort that even the worst news would do me good.

So you will be kind enough to write to me again, won’t you?

Yours, F. Kafka

A question I have been meaning to ask for a long time: Is the exhibition of office equipment going to be held in Prague, and will you be coming?

*To Grete Bloch*

[February 7, 1914]

Dear Fräulein Bloch,

I want to reply at once, not to tell you anything important, let alone important to *your* human predicament, but simply in order to write to you, in order to do something for you no matter how pointless and useless; it seems to me that my basically false relationship with you has been partly conditioned by the fact that (outwardly these words seem grandiose, inwardly no word is grand enough) I have kept trying to come closer to you by breaking out of some unconquerable inhibition which simultaneously thrust me forward and held me back, and despite all my lovely self-knowledge I have blamed you for my failure. And yet all this is only the result of my having met you through F., that when we first met in Prague I was forced to talk to you, a complete stranger after all, about F., that I actually counted on the compassion of this stranger intentionally (the intention follows naturally, one doesn’t presuppose it), that my loquacity in matters of this kind (if need be my loquacity can manage on a word or two) knows no bounds and sickens me to death—all this and more were the reasons why subsequently, however much I felt like it, I was unable to write without uttering those hateful defensive remarks.

I don’t think compassion makes one any happier, certainly not any better; on the other hand, the sharing of suffering, if one is capable of it in general and toward a particular person, is in my experience a blessing and also makes one a better person. After all, you can’t have a pair of scales with both sides rising at the same time. The more people who know of one’s suffering, the worse becomes the suffering, and if not worse then less pure. But it surely becomes worse too, more substantial; one looks at it with the others’ eyes, from other angles, and if hitherto one may have seen and borne it all grimly with narrowed eyes, one now has to open them wide in face of this public substantiality and give in to the bitter end. However, if it becomes no worse, merely less pure, then that may be worse still, for at that moment disgust makes one lose all hope of overcoming it.

I felt something of this kind at the Schwarze Ross,[7] feel it each time I talk to anyone in this way, even my best friend (for example, when it happens with my mother, my disgust virtually makes me shudder). But during these discussions, it must be added, my entire being experiences pleasure and satisfaction, my vanity is gratified—and so, wouldn’t it be a relief for me (however false it may be) to shake it all off and say: the other was to blame?

But that is not all, I mustn’t engage in these thoughts, they won’t get me anywhere, it’s only in my feelings

[Presumably the continuation of this letter]

that I am fairly sure. But perhaps this is enough to explain what happened in the past and eliminate the need to discuss it any further.

Moreover, things are quite different now: you are no longer a stranger to me, especially since that last letter; the anguish which is associated with confessions (if they are not entirely forced and one-sided) is, after all, the anguish of human relationships in general; as long as one is alive one mustn’t set lifeless rules—for this and a number of similar reasons (if you agree, and I do hope you will) everything between us must be amicable and we must be able to talk frankly to each other. And when writing about yourself you are no longer to add: “the fact that you can’t be interested in this.”

I shall not write to Erna Bauer. I really took her to be Felice's confidante; but even if she were, I wouldn't write to her. Can I permit myself to use roundabout ways to force F. to my side? Isn't it enough that I should accept the fact that you write to F. on my behalf and that I am grateful for it? But you needn't have kept it a secret that I wrote to you; you would have been entitled to say anything, and not merely because it's so uncertain whether help of any kind is still possible. F. has lost confidence in me; indeed there are many good reasons for it, and that page to which I referred earlier, in the 40-page letter, is not the least important one. And, with her confidence, whatever else F. may have felt for me has also vanished. What is F. to do? But why she doesn't write to you I am at a loss to explain.

You ask why F.'s last letter was sad. Here is one sentence: "Marriage would mean that we should each have to sacrifice a good deal; let us not try to establish where the excess weight would be. It is a good deal, for each of us." This sentence is really so dreadful (however much actual truth it may contain) that it can't possibly express F.'s feelings. It is so contrary to F.'s nature, must be contrary to it, but the very fact that she was capable of putting that sentence on paper, no matter for what reason, is sad and deprives me of almost any hope for the future. Incidentally, it was not a letter written without careful consideration, it is supposed to have been preceded by a number of letters that were never mailed (as she also wrote in the letter to you). Insofar as F. and I have a joint future, it seems to exist only in the letter you have now written.

If you feel like it, do tell me who the man in Munich is. Can he neither see nor hear? What makes you so important to him, and him to you? Didn't you once tell me or write that you are thinking of joining the South German branch of your firm next year? And what is the meaning of that passage in your letter which refers to the "basic condition of marriage," and which I don't quite understand? By the way, I have thought of something quite unconnected with this. You once wrote that your room is dark and that you can't afford a better one. How is this, since your salary is adequate? What

a profuse writer and profuse questioner I have become! I'll stop now. Farewell!

Yours, F. Kafka

The book should have arrived at the same time as my letter. I will go and inquire at the bookshop tomorrow.

*To Grete Bloch*

February 8, 1914

Deal Fräulein Bloch,

I am sorry for all our sakes, needless to say for yours in particular, that you were forced to be untruthful in your letter to F. and perhaps even in your telegram (how can I ever thank you for it?). But of course what is bad is not the untruthfulness but the situation itself, which by now can be approached only with untruths.

You are right, the sentence in F.'s letter is bad. Outwardly it is no more than a misunderstanding of matters of which I have been trying to convince her for a whole year; yet inwardly it is probably more than mere misunderstanding. Although the letter doesn't consist only of that one sentence, that sentence stands out. The most depressing aspect is that it doesn't agree with anything I know about F.; on the other hand, there is no definite mention anywhere of a fundamental change.

I am very pleased that you liked the *Galley*. Once one has pushed one's head through the construction that surrounds the whole novel like a fence (actually I don't quite know how this can be accounted for in W.'s character), one is almost dazzled by its vitality. I may soon be able to send you something else by him.

By the way, how do you spend your Sundays? After your exertions during the week? Is it wise to exert yourself in this way? Will you be able to keep it up for long? What was the illness you told me about the other day? The time you spent on your last letter was probably snatched from your lunch hour; that is as wrong as it

is kind. But I won't say any more, for I am now altogether more indebted to you than to any other human being; of this I am well aware, in spite of my head which at this moment (do all things have to reach the point of utter absurdity?) is quite numb with toothache.

Yours, F. Kafka

February 9, 1914

In spite of everything, F., in spite of everything (and this "everything" is a great deal), when your postcard arrived today, it was again as on the first day. On this postcard, casually handed to me by the clerk as an object of no importance, there are once more words addressed by you to me, good rather than bad even if ambiguous words, but at any rate words from you to me, at least you show yourself to me, you wish to have something to do with me after all, whatever the occasion—I felt faint with joy when I read it; the apple I was about to eat was not merely put aside, it simply dropped from my hand. Later, much later, when I had to do some dictating—the moment I tried to lose myself in my dictation, it went through my head at once: "What's the matter? Why do you feel so different?" and I knew at once why I felt so different.

Not that anything has happened; you write to me, but who knows what it implies. Is it right to assume you felt you had to write this postcard, even though you could hardly bring yourself to write the last letters? Is this right? No, that is not quite the way it is, nor can have been. Whatever the reason, F., don't withdraw the hand you now hold out to me, however weakly. Let me hold on to it, as you once allowed me to.

But now I recall your last letter again and the "excess weight." In the light of this, am I entitled to try and lure you from a position in which you feel at ease, needless to say relatively at ease (I do finally seem to have convinced you of this, unless it is that I have robbed you of some other conviction), and draw you over to me? But there isn't time to talk about this now, either.

There is only time now, F., to beg you not to turn so silent again as to make one dash to and fro here in Prague (for me Berlin really hangs over Prague like the sky over the earth) in one's desperate bewilderment—blindly, heedless, and forever toying with the same thoughts, about which this is not the right time to talk, either. That is all I ask of you, nothing else. Tell me frankly what you think; I shall reply likewise. What I think, I don't have to tell you: the best part of it you know already.

Franz

*To Grete Bloch*

February 9, 1914

Dear Fräulein Bloch,

A card from F. has arrived, a short but nevertheless friendly card; as a matter of fact I have ceased to trust, to rely upon this friendliness, for F. has never written to me in a less friendly fashion. But so far as you are concerned this doesn't matter, nor does it matter how I am going to square my conscience over this extorted postcard (the all but transparent final remark of which reads: "I had to write this postcard"). What matters, rather, is that the card is here, that I alone couldn't have brought it about, that F., of her own free will, couldn't have written it, and that I owe it entirely to you. What power you have over F.!

Perhaps I shall have some news from you tomorrow, and you probably know about the postcard already. Now that I am infinitely more indebted to you than I have been hitherto, words almost fail me, I feel so humiliated, and not just humiliated, that wouldn't matter, would be my due, but I feel as if I had humiliated you by asking you to extract the card from F. in this way (in this way, what am I saying? It wasn't possible in any other). Don't mention it again, I know this feeling will pass, in this respect my sensitivity is only slightly greater than my forgetfulness, but I had to say it so that prior to and more important than expressing my gratitude I could ask you to forgive me.

Yours, F. Kafka

*To Grete Bloch*

February 11, 1914

Dear Fräulein Bloch, no, I don't believe it, and you too write without believing it; but for your letter, F. would not have written to me. Don't misunderstand me, I am quite content that she didn't write to me of her own accord; after all, I want her to be like that, or, in clearer and simpler terms, I want her to be precisely what she is. If I were to go in for sophistry, I should have to say (I am not saying it but am not hiding it from you, either) that it is more painful for me that she wrote, more painful than if she hadn't written; for it shows that her resistance was of a kind that can be overcome, overcome by you, yet not by me.

What you say about mutual help is not quite correct. If someone falls into the water and another, hearing his screams, pulls him out, this is a normal case of rendering assistance, and between friends does not have to create a sense of "indebtedness." You, however, in order to help me were forced to be untruthful, thus had to do something you certainly wouldn't have done to save yourself, something that I perhaps, but only perhaps, wouldn't do either, in order to save myself. So that is why I am "indebted" to you, because you didn't merely have to do something for me but at the same time had to do something against yourself. Owing to your good nature you may not have taken this too hard, which makes it all the harder, to the point of nausea, for me. May I ask you (though not for the purpose of cancelling my "indebtedness"; such cancellation is out of the question) in your very next letter to F. to admit frankly, without sparing me in any way, that I knew about your first letter, in fact had prevailed upon you to write it and had thereby hoped, with justification as it turned out, to obtain some news of her. Please, dear Fräulein Bloch, do tell her that; moreover, make it irrespective of what F. answers me, which, incidentally, is something that has not occurred as yet, although it could have by now.

Your last letter gave me a very clear picture of your life. Here too the weather is dull, but at 2 P.M. the light has to be switched on only in dark back rooms such as yours. I don't think I ever knew that you played the piano and liked music. With whom do you play the piano, and go on excursions into the mountains? I envy you your addiction to sleep. How you must indulge it on Sunday afternoons in your dark room! If only I could! If only sleep would pay some attention to me! While I had toothache and because it made my head numb (the pain itself has gone; had I known about camomile tea I should have had some, but medicines must never be suggested to me), I did sleep on and off, but for the last 2 days hardly at all. The kind of sleep I know—with its superficial dreams that are not at all fantastic, but merely a more agitated repetition of the day's thoughts—is definitely more wakeful and strenuous than being awake. There are moments in the office while talking or dictating when my sleep is more real than when I am asleep. And you have this addiction to sleep! Sleeping is better than reading; with this reservation in mind I will suggest a book, a splendid book in fact, moreover one that embodies all that's good about Vienna. Please read it! *My Life* by Countess Lulu Thürheim, published by Georg Müller, 2 volumes. You will certainly find it at the university library. It's expensive, 12 marks, I think, unbound.

Kind regards, yours, F. Kafka

*To Grete Bloch*

February 14, 1914

Dear Fräulein Bloch, although you are very depressed you are working—there is no such thing as working "in spite of it," in that sense—you work and earn exceptionally high wages for your age, you take no time off, you have transferred your entire existence to Vienna, are preparing yourself to leave again and, if anything, to work harder; in that case you must have at your disposal energy which you can draw upon in future. It's not a waning of energy you feel, that's not the way to express it, it's just that in youth there is a

lassitude that is unknown to age, in compensation for all the rest. Shedding tears in the gallery at the opera doesn't mean a waning of energy, don't you believe it. In Prague, during the admittedly rare moments (it was my fault they were so rare) when you were a little more cheerful (in the sense of being lively and sensible, you were always more cheerful than I), the expression on your face was that of a perfectly normal and healthy child. True, your expression didn't quite fit the rest of your personality, especially your superiority so far as I was concerned, yet it did seem to be your very own expression. This was noticeable, for example, on several occasions at the coffeehouse when you were talking about your schooldays, and once outside the Kunstgewerbe Museum when you stumbled.

Vienna may be to blame, though now you speak highly of it again. It's not always the best thing to be so resigned. I couldn't imagine you so sad in Berlin, and I'm certain you weren't when you were there. Here, one could sometimes think, the gay ones become sad and the sad ones sadder still. I can think of no explanation, nor is one necessary, for it isn't true and only shows how undiscerning sadness is. For my part, I wouldn't want to be in Vienna, not even in May. It was far too unpleasant for me there, nothing on earth would induce me to set out again for the House of Parliament, revisit Kärntnerstrasse, Stephansplatz, sit at the Cafés Beethoven or Museum, let alone the Ratskeller, and never again would I feel like wandering about alone in the gardens of Schönbrunn on a rather cool but very sunny morning. I have no wish to relive all that and a great deal more, it has all been atoned for once and for all. The Grillparzer Room[8] in City Hall is the one thing I should like to see, I missed it, not having heard of it until too late. Do you know "The Poor Musician" by Grillparzer? That one can well and truly suffer in Vienna was certainly proved by Grillparzer.

Needless to say, I no longer ask you to give F. an explanation; I asked merely because I thought the postcard implied the beginning of better times and I didn't want to think I had obtained this improvement fraudulently by being untruthful as well as by forcing you to be so. But now the card implies something quite different. I

am copying it in full, it is written with a wretched pencil and will soon be illegible: “Berlin, Anhalt Station, Feb. 8, 1914, 10:30 P.M.

“Franz, I am sitting here in the waiting room to meet my sister, who is arriving from Dresden. Let me send you many sincere greetings. One of these days you will be hearing more from me. I had to write this postcard. Affectionately, Felice.”

So F. got your letter on Saturday, couldn’t make up her mind to write, then on Sunday evening she happened to be sitting at the Anhalt Station, yielded to a passing impulse, and wrote this postcard, thereby the following day felt obliged to you send a card as well; her card to me, however, was intended to do no more than introduce a renewed silence, reemphasized by this card, for to my immediate letter to which there should have been a reply, there was none. The terrible or the good thing is that nearly all assumptions are wrong.

Kindest regards, yours, F. Kafka

*To Grete Bloch*

February 19, 1914

Dear Fräulein Bloch, it will always be like this (unless, contrary to your usual punctuality, you don’t answer or you stipulate in advance that you don’t mean to answer for 1 or 2 weeks, which I should have to accept), I must admonish or at least remind you at once, for unfortunately I was brought up to fear behind every silence some snag that could undo me. I hope it is nothing of the kind, merely that you have so much work to do, which is bad enough—or, which would be better, that the Countess Thürheim [*My Life*] is keeping you up night after night.

By the way, since my last letter I have had a strange stroke of fortune which I must not hide from you whom I don’t spare with my troubles. The last of my closer, unmarried, unengaged friends [Felix Weltsch] has got engaged; while I have foreseen this engagement for 3 years (for the outsider, no great perspicacity was required), he and she have known of it for a mere fortnight. Thus to some extent I am

losing a friend, for a married friend isn't a true one. Anything he is told will be revealed to his wife either silently or explicitly, and the woman in whose head all information doesn't become distorted probably doesn't exist. Moreover, even if this were not so, one can no longer think of him alone, cannot expect from him that intimate comfort and help, nor even assume the possibility of such comfort or help, for now, whatever happens, one is faced by a partnership. But apart from the fact that I naturally wish him the best of everything, there is also a lucky side to it for me, at least for the moment. For, though we are not all that old, as a matter of fact he is 6 months my junior, we formed a kind of bachelor fraternity which, for me at any rate, had moments of being downright spectral. This is now dissolved; I am free; alone everyone can be what he wants to be and is; in such an isolated structure no one, not even its owner, can look all the way to the bottom and get scared down there, whereas a group is more accessible and more capable of inspection. Congratulate me, even if it is merely a disguised request for a letter. What is your view of F.'s postcard?

Kind regards, F.K.

*To Grete Bloch*

[Started on February 21 or 22, finished on February 25, 1914]

Dear Fräulein Bloch, you mustn't deprive me of words as ugly as "states of mind unworthy of mention"; they are mine and have no business to appear in your letters. I sometimes think that to the very limits of human capacity I can share (not sympathize; man makes no distinction, only God) with others the experience of their state of mind; please, do not refer to the states of mind of a person with whom I am very much concerned as "unworthy of mention." They are not unworthy from the point of view of the narrator, nor is the listener unworthy of them, though in other respects nothing bad enough can be said about him.

It may be necessary to take honesty yet one step further. My first letter to you was written entirely on account of F.; of this there is no

doubt whatever. I wanted help and yet I was rude, like an unhappy child. That was one of the reasons why you once reproached yourself so profoundly on account of my trip to Berlin. All these ideas must have occurred to you on account of my letters. You once wrote: “The events of the month of November.” What sort of events? What were they but things that had recurred almost continuously for the past 18 months like drumbeats from sticks held in my own wretched hands.

However, the letters asking you for help are of the past. You did what you could and in your kindness almost more than you should have done. You draw the unhappiness of this situation upon yourself from right and left; in Prague you were forced to put up with my “No” (there must be something in me after all, since I was capable of summoning the nerve for that first short letter to you), and now you hear F.’s “No”—more painful to you and moreover ambiguous. So I am no longer asking for help, which means that a great change has taken place, for in the past I should have asked even more urgently had it not been for the pretense, no longer justified, that I was writing to you merely to ask for your help; a pretense that I confess was justified for longer than I was outwardly prepared to admit. I don’t want any more help, all I want (as long as you want it a little) is to hear how you are. If some news about F. creeps in, so much the better, but even then it won’t be the main point. If there is any help for us, for F. and me, it is up to ourselves, which has been demonstrated by your effort and the reward it brought. After all, what is at stake here is not a practical matter in which another person could help, it is a matter of responsibility both here and there, though more, infinitely more so here. Perhaps one day this self-help will succeed, even if my hair turns white in the process, but then my hair turns white quite rapidly.

So will you regard your letters to me in this light?

February 25

The above was written 3 or 4 days ago; I had planned the letter to contain an interminable message, was forced to stop, and

then—as is the way with unfinished things—it lay there for days. In any case I would have finished it today.

Now, dear Fräulein Bloch, see how strange it is. F.'s letter and mine were probably written on the same day. Compare them.

II

You are not doing wrong by quoting sentences from F.'s letter; you are doing right, being very kind, very understanding. What you are doing isn't wrong, what is wrong is the situation you find yourself in at this moment, owing to F.'s behavior as well as mine. At first I was very sorry about F.'s letter, less on account of its contents than because of its arrival at this particular moment. Yet had I not been told about it, I should have been even more embarrassed, although of course embarrassment is no longer an issue.

Enough for today, though I think I have a great deal to tell you. Next time. It is 7 P.M. and I am still in the office; foreseeing that I wouldn't do much work, I brought along the unfinished letter. I shall write to you again soon; needless to say, F. will not hear about your letter.

What's the point of sleeping in a half-lighted room? Such experiments are not good. Why the light, since you sleep in spite of it? Isn't the light bound to disturb your sleep or at least have a bad effect on it? Especially since it appears to be gaslight. If so, how can the window be kept open at night, as it surely must be? I personally wouldn't press these questions, it is merely the practitioner of natural therapy in me who does.

Kind regards, F.K.

*To Grete Bloch*

[PICTURE POSTCARD: POSTMARK: Dresden, March 1, 1914]

Kindest, kindest regards. Dresden railway station. Have been to Berlin. It couldn't have been worse. Next thing will be impalement. You will get detailed letter.

Yours, F.

*To Grete Bloch*

March 2, 1914

Dear Fräulein Bloch, I have just written a long letter to Felice,[9] I don't know if I am in the right frame of mind to tell you about my trip (you got my postcard from Dresden?). On the other hand, it is true that if I owe a report and feel the urge to report to anyone, then it is to you, to you alone. If there was any comfort in these two days, it was the thought of you, your loyalty and honesty.

Judging by today's postcard you don't seem to have quite gathered from my last letter that I intended to go to Berlin. I had definitely decided about 10 days ago, which is why I said that F.'s letter had come at an inopportune moment, for it made it seem as though I was going on account of this letter, which in turn must have made F. realize that you had communicated to me a part of this letter. But it didn't come to that; I told a lie, saying I hadn't heard from you for a fortnight, which F. accepted quite readily, the more so since she hasn't had a reply from you either, though she was expecting it that very Saturday (I arrived at the same time as the mailman). F. maintained that you were now "taking your revenge," which I maliciously enjoyed. (I didn't get much opportunity for enjoyment.)

I had taken a day off and arrived in Berlin on Friday night, still uncertain whether F. was actually in Berlin. On Saturday morning I went to F.'s office, asked the girl to take a card to F. (a certain Gotthart's card which I happened to have on me at the time; I had no wish to be stared at in case my name should be familiar to the girl), and waited. Before me stood the switchboard which in my case had never proved to be of use. I was very happy to be there. Then F. came out (there were a lot of people in her room at the time), she

was rather but not unduly surprised, quite friendly, and we stood there together for a little while. Then at lunchtime I spent an hour with her in a tea shop. After the office (I then saw her room) we walked about for two hours. That evening F. went to a ball which, so she said, she ought not to miss for business reasons. Sunday morning we spent more than 3 hours going for a walk and in a coffeehouse. In the afternoon I left, F. had firmly promised to come but didn't. As a matter of fact, today she does apologize by telegram, it had been impossible; the impossibility is called Aunt Marta, or something of the kind.

The result of all this was as follows: F. quite likes me, but in her opinion this is not enough for marriage, for this particular marriage; she has insurmountable fears about a joint future; she might not be able to put up with my idiosyncrasies; she might not be able to forego Berlin; she is afraid of having to dispense with nice clothes, of traveling third class, sitting in cheaper seats in the theater (this sounds ridiculous only when put on paper), etc. On the other hand she is friendly toward me (not in conversation, of course; she doesn't answer); in the streets we walk arm in arm like the happiest of engaged couples; we say "*Du*" to each other even in front of Dr. Weiss whom we happened to run into; my picture, as F. showed me, is in a locket she was given in November; she claims she wouldn't marry anyone else; she would never dispose of my letters, nor wish to return my photographs, nor ask for hers to be returned; while she would like to go on writing, she would be equally willing to stop writing altogether.—These revelations accompanied me during the night of Saturday to Sunday, and on my return journey.

Yours, F.K.

[IN THE MARGIN OF THE THIRD PAGE] The letter to Munich has of course been mailed, not without misgivings.

*To Grete Bloch*

March 3, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, the natural-therapy practitioner is not surprised that you are suffering from headaches; the friend, however, is very sorry. But leading the life you do, how is it possible to ward off headaches, since you work so hard, rarely go out, never do any exercises, spend the evenings lying on a sofa, and then exchange it for your bed, sleep with your windows shut, leave the gaslight on at night, receive tormenting news almost daily (as you once wrote), feel yourself abandoned by your family and suffer as a result (F., who has been to see your family several times, told me that your mother missed you and would be happy if you had a job in Berlin)—after all, even the soundest head can't stand being assailed from all sides at once. On my advice wouldn't you adopt a vegetarian diet for a time as a first and very slight change in your mode of life? I really can't imagine that you are particularly well looked after in that minor hell of a pension which, incidentally, you see very objectively, thereby rendering it rather more harmless. Or is the "brute" such a wonderful cook? And in an overtired and overworked body like yours (heavens above, in the office till 11!), meat causes nothing but devastation; the headaches are no more than the body's complaints about it. Come to think of it, on Opolzer Strasse, near the Hofburg Theater, you can find the best vegetarian restaurant I know. Clean, friendly, run by a pleasant family. It may be even nearer to your office than your room is, and I assume you rush back there merely in order to have lunch and rush off again. There is no doubt that eating *en pension* at the Thalisia (that's the name of the restaurant) is cheaper than at your present pension, and after all cheapness does matter to you, since (this had never occurred to me before; how can you be expected to do it?) you have to send money home as well. But I have no doubt that the food is much better there and that you will enjoy it (though perhaps not for the first few days), that you will feel altogether freer and more robust, that you will sleep better and moreover in the dark, and that you will be fresher and I hope wake up without a headache. If only you would try it.

(My parents have come to sit at the table, I can no longer write in peace; my father is breathing heavily through his mouth, he is just

reading the evening paper but after that he starts his usual game of cards with my mother, accompanied by exclamations, laughter, and squabbling, not to mention whistling.)

The letter to Munich I mailed at once, but didn't know if I was doing the right thing, don't know even now. Not being in a position to judge, I did what you suggested. Surely a meeting invariably makes for clarity, why shouldn't this one have done so? I think in vain about the connection that is supposed to have existed between you, the girl, and the man. Did this happen in Berlin?

On Sunday morning when you were writing your last remarks about F. and me, F. and I were walking in the Tiergarten. Perhaps at that very moment F. was saying: "Please stop imploring me. You keep wanting the impossible," or perhaps she was saying: "That's the way it is. You must believe it. You mustn't attach importance to every word," or: "I quite like you, but that is not enough for marriage. And I don't do things by halves." To which I replied: "But then the other is only a half, too," to which F. said: "Yes, but it's the bigger half." But it's more likely that while you were writing F. said nothing whatever, and instead stared sullenly to one side and let me go on talking irresponsibly and making promises, all of which I retracted yesterday in a letter.[10]

You will have noticed a difference between my card from Dresden and yesterday's letter. It can be explained by a sound and firm resolution enabling me to go on living alone, without F. (at least without F. as the main factor in my life), as long as is humanly possible. Before this can happen some time will have to elapse; but the moment something comes of it I will let you know.

What a pity you don't come here on business some time. So the exhibition is to be held, after all? I asked F., but she knew nothing about it, merely knew of an exhibition which will probably be held in Düsseldorf next year.

As a rule, by 7 I have no business being at the office unless I have been preoccupied with my own thoughts and done nothing all morning, or if I want to take a day off, as I did the other day.

If my signature has changed recently it means the opposite of what you think, or rather don't think, merely mention jokingly. I

don’t like to see my name in writing, and automatically assume that the same applies to anyone to whom I feel close. What is contained in a name is obvious to that person. Nevertheless: Kindest regards, yours,

Franz Kafka

*To Grete Bloch*

March 4, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, I don’t know if I shall have much time to write, someone may suddenly come to fetch me; nevertheless I am writing at once, I don’t want to keep you waiting unnecessarily even if this letter contains nothing of importance, I don’t want to cause you even the faintest, briefest surprise at not getting an answer, you are too—let us say—too important to me for that. But you decide (yes, someone has just telephoned me, I shall have to stop soon) according to your wishes the intervals at which we can write to each other quite regularly from now on, irrespective of delaying moods and chance happenings, and also, of course, subject to imparting important news before the appointed time. I, for my part, am delighted to know you, but I believe this correspondence won’t do you any harm either, especially since this sadness with which I am everlastingly burdened, and which up to now I have invariably thrust upon you, may after all come to an end. Think for example how long it took me, in this frame of mind, to recognize you! How I could sit beside you in the hotel like a regular dried-out intriguer, only half listening to what you had to say![11]

From your letter I can’t tell for certain whether you have had both letters I wrote since my visit to F., or only the second one, and this is why I am not sure which details about F. you know, and which you want to know. F.’s appearance varies; out of doors she generally looks very well, indoors sometimes tired and older, with rough, blotchy skin. Her teeth, all of them, are in a worse condition than they used to be, each one has a filling. This Monday she started another series of visits to the dentist who is making new gold

crowns for her. All this and more I can note, see, observe carefully, but in no way does it alter my feelings for F.

Her objections to marrying me were uttered just as seriously as I quoted them the other day, with the possible exception of the remarks about trains, theater seats, etc., which were dropped casually, but nevertheless directed specifically against me. No, I don't consider them superficial opinions, I can't say that; why shouldn't they be well founded? If I love the whole, I must love the consequences, too; the fact that this sometimes makes one want to bare one's teeth doesn't alter anything. But you, dear Fräulein Grete, surely you should know F. in this respect?

I have just glanced at my watch, I must stop, I shall answer the rest of your letter tomorrow.

Farewell, and please go on being a good friend to

your (how shall I put it?) Franz K.

who in recognition of the sun has but the icy coldness of his room, which he prefers to keep to himself.

*To Grete Bloch*

March 6, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, this is good news, but so indefinite. Granted, as long as there was no question of your trip it was even more indefinite, so I ought to be content. Do come, do come if it is at all possible. But—if it were to be for one afternoon only, and no more, don't come on an afternoon such as this when, stiff with headaches after a wretched night, I spent 2 hours lying on the sofa, hardly knowing what I was doing, surely a sight to scare anyone away. On the other hand—if it were to be for a single afternoon only, come all the same, my headaches will be gone, I shall be quite bearable, I shall be unbearable only if you don't come. You will come, or you wouldn't have filled me with such anticipation by your announcement, you wouldn't have done that.

Now that I know you are coming I have no desire to write, there's no point. Where will your journey take you? Only to Bohemia? Or really to Budapest as well? You will send me a postcard now and then? All the same, for me the feeling that you will be traveling (needless to say, apart from the fact that you will be coming here) is a little uncanny; knowing you were in Vienna gave me a sense of security, you were always accessible; but now you will be exposed to the uncertainties of a journey. Have your headaches vanished? It is not enough merely to thank me for my advice without at least giving it a try. It's a pity that the vegetarian restaurant in Prague is so bad and dirty that I shan't be able to take you there.

You have something to tell me, but have postponed it. Does this mean that you will be able to tell me at all? Well, I shall expect you as from Monday.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

Yes, the address: Altstädter Ring 6

*To Grete Bloch*

[March 7, 1914]

Dear Fräulein Grete, so now again you are not coming! You oughtn't to have raised my hopes in order to disappoint them. Or are you coming to Prague after all, only later, not till after Budapest? Surely someone will have to take care of the machines here, everything is in a terrible muddle, believe me.

So we won't decide on the timing of the letters, you may be right. However, I have decided on this negative timing: you are not to write another line in the rush before your departure from Vienna, but by all means a postcard immediately on your arrival in Budapest. So your trip to Budapest is coming off, after all.

What you said about your family in your last letter but one still keeps going around in my head. On a Sunday afternoon in a carriage out in the country we could have discussed it quietly and at

length; today, indoors, with pains constantly simmering in the back of my head, I can say only a few words. I think I have discovered that on the whole parents are more just to their children than the other way around. Parents may seem to be unjust, even below the surface, but this is not so. As soon as irreconcilable differences (which always exist, of course) are intensified by a particular situation, the first reaction on both sides is one of pride. Parents know their children thoroughly and look beyond them, while children imagine that they are in exactly the same position toward their parents. To humble oneself is difficult, especially in such a clearly defined relationship, but it is not entirely decisive for this relationship. Only the moments of extreme crisis are decisive, and it is then—as I have seen with friends, in my own case I merely sense it—that the parents, breaking out of this mixture of abomination, brutality, and cunning that has been ascribed to them, step forth so spontaneously that one stands there as though before a miracle. There are more, or at least more permanently, misunderstood parents than there are misunderstood children. Undoubtedly you attribute to yourself some guilt in relation to your parents, for you say you are a reticent and unfriendly daughter. But being reticent and unfriendly is tantamount to refusing to face the situation, to refusing to be just, because to be just takes a lifetime, and that is hardly long enough. But I do admit that it may be impossible to be just toward one's parents; I at least am incapable of it; but however difficult one's own case may be, one should be able to feel the possibility of loving.—Do you know the enclosed story ["The Judgment"]? It is an offprint from a yearbook [*Arkadia*], take it along on your journey. Perhaps you will like it better than "The Stoker."

I can't give you any specific information about F.'s attitude toward you. Where she is concerned, my critical faculties have become so feeble that every opinion strikes me as equally wrong. Actually we talked very little about you, for—I repeat—in the 7 hours or so we spent together F., at least as far as I remember, hardly ever finished a sentence. She seemed neither noticeably close to you, nor noticeably distant. While writing this, it occurs to me

that the frame of mind she was in can't have been normal.—She seemed a little disturbed by the absence of news from you. Once, in Dr. Weiss's company (when she happened to be lively and very friendly toward me), she said jokingly (I had been telling them that you had very much liked the *Galley*): "Frl. Bloch seems to mean a great deal to you." I could only answer in the affirmative. I can really say nothing about F.'s attitude toward you, less even than about her attitude toward me.

Yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

March 9, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, I can't penetrate your frame of mind sufficiently to understand why you write a sentence like: "I am sick to death" when referring to your work. When it is your work that affords you complete independence from

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Best wishes Felix
my small nephew has just been here, I let him add his good wishes to you; perhaps this innocence has greater powers of wishing and greeting than my quivering head

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both Berlin and Munich, the two sides which threaten it most—this, surely, ought to make it worth while, whatever else it may entail. And what's more, it is full of prospects; you yourself mentioned that you were thinking of going eventually to England or America, and your office writing paper is headed by a list of the most desirable branch offices, with only one exception; this, the very one you are in at present, alas, seems undesirable not only on account of the city but also on account of your superiors. The monotony of your work (which in Berlin doesn't appear to have been quite as crushing) does not strike me as too great a price to pay for your independence and freedom and the sense of well-being that goes with them. My advice on this subject is and always will be: get out of Vienna. If it is

impossible to open at least a subsidiary, if not a full branch office in Prague, with you in charge (from the business point of view it seems absurd not to exploit a commercial area such as Bohemia), wouldn't it be better to go direct to, say, Frankfurt? Moreover, I hardly think that any additional experience you may gain in Vienna will be useful to you in the future, although, or perhaps just because, business in Vienna is more difficult than elsewhere. And yet it seems that you intend to establish yourself in Vienna for some time to come.

Incidentally: is it from your desk, or from your chief's room, that the Postal Savings Bank building can be seen? If I am not mistaken it was built by Otto Wagner[12] and at one time much admired. For my part, I can well imagine what a depressing sight an obtrusively self-conscious building of this kind must offer. There seems to be no ending to paragraphs other than: get out of Vienna.

The only objection I have to our meeting at Easter is that it is 4 weeks hence. But if I am to talk about the future, I must be quite frank. This is how it should be, for I don't want to have even temporary secrets from you, but then you mustn't talk about fears for our friendship which have no deeper justification than all fears for all things human. No, dear Fräulein Grete, we won't mention this again. However, my situation is as follows: last Monday I wrote a letter to F.—it seems silly, but I just cannot get it onto paper. Had I had the opportunity on Sunday, I would gladly have told you all about it in person; now I ask you to give me another 2 or 3 days, by which time it will have resolved itself anyway; it isn't even so much a question of F., but of me and of the resolution that I have mentioned already. Anyway, if I am in Prague at Easter we must meet, either in Vienna, in Prague, or, and this might be best of all, somewhere halfway, in the Bohemian Forest, perhaps. Please don't hold it against me, in no way against me, that I didn't complete the above sentence; it makes me quite unhappy enough, for it shows how much I have still to overcome within myself before I can carry out my resolution. The one good thing is that it will have to be decided very soon.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

March 12 [probably 11], 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, it would have been a good thing, after all, if we had decided on set times for our letters. In that case I wouldn't have ever-recurring thoughts, horrid thoughts that for some reason you are cross with me, for some reason think you ought not to write to me, whereas undoubtedly there is no reason for your not writing other than that you are overworked at the office, or may even have gone to Budapest.

The other day I didn't tell you even the most important things I meant to say about your last letter; I didn't feel like going on after the failure with myself that I experienced at the end of that letter. Could you have been disconcerted by its ending? You may not yet realize as I do that although our respective relationships with F. cannot be eliminated—for that they are too strong, perhaps indissoluble—they at least no longer form the most important part in our own relationship; so that I may well pass the whole affair over in silence when words fail me, but that this should not prevent the hands we held out to each other in friendship from being clasped as firmly as ever. To me the situation with F. is so unclear, or rather, somewhere so deep down that my eyes can hardly reach it, so terribly clear that with every word I say it becomes even more obscure, more turbid, more agonizing. But now I hope the days before reaching the conclusion can be counted on one hand.

[Presumably the continuation of this letter]

Please, in no circumstances come to Prague for the day on a Sunday, in order to leave again in the evening, don't even think of it; how could I possibly bear to see you under such a strain, you who are not short of strains as it is. On the other hand it might be possible, since you stop work at 3 on Saturday, if you felt like it one day before Easter, for both of us to set off and meet somewhere halfway one Saturday evening and spend Sunday together. Would you like

that? I would love it. Do write and tell me. Then we can study the timetables and find a nice place.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

Are you reading Countess Thürheim?

*To Grete Bloch*

March 12, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, only a few words: today I had a letter from F. (I am ashamed to say by what means I extracted it; if the forces I employed could be concentrated, the sun could be plucked from the heavens); perhaps it doesn't explain everything, but a great deal, including F.'s attitude toward you. F.'s family has suffered a great misfortune; her letter gives no details except that yesterday her brother sailed for America. I don't know whether this is a secret, surely not so far as you are concerned. The misfortune may be very grave; my first selfish reaction was to see it as my good fortune, since for the first time for ages, for 6 months or so, I once again heard a human note in F.'s voice. If only the means I employed to achieve this hadn't been quite so shameful!

Perhaps I shall have some news of you tomorrow. You are not angry with me, you mustn't be; it wasn't you who reduced me to silence at the end of my last letter but one, it was merely the paper.

Incidentally, today I suggested to F. that we should meet tomorrow evening in Dresden; I ought to have a telegram with her answer by tomorrow morning.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

March 13, 1914

You are unhappy, F., and I upset you. That is my misfortune. To be a comfort to you, if only a small comfort, that would be my joy. But this I cannot be. You distinguish between my relationship with you

on the one hand, and the misfortune in your family on the other, as though they were two entirely different things, the former being of minor importance. If this is what you do, then that is how it is, or at least appears to be, for in this respect I don't want to say anything definite; that is for you to do, F.

I don't know how many times I have read your two letters. There are good things in them, certainly; but also much that is sad, and most of it is a mixture, neither pleasant nor sad. Your telegram today makes everything a little more obscure, or—to borrow from you a word without which I cannot get along—more bitter. It was not particularly wise of me, perhaps not particularly tactful either, to ask you to come to Dresden tomorrow, since now, during the first few days after the misfortune, you have to be on hand for your parents. If I made a mistake, then the 7 words in your telegram are sufficient punishment.[13] But perhaps it was not so much a mistake as my inability to differentiate, as you do, between your family's misfortune and myself.

Let us forget about it, F.; but what is to happen now? On no account, F., on no account are you to cast me back into the uncertainty from which yesterday's letters enabled me to emerge by at least an inch. On no account are you to do it, I am not going back there again; I would willingly sacrifice all the good in me and escape with the rest, no matter where. However, if we mean to make any progress we shall certainly have to talk to each other; no doubt you think so too, F., don't you? And surely the place where this could be done most easily, conveniently, freely, and fully, is Dresden. You yourself suggested it casually the other day in Berlin, and have mentioned it on several occasions before. There is no serious obstacle to prevent it, so are you prepared to do it next Saturday? Lately you have been unable to write, and even now it is still torture to you, and this to some extent I understand, which is an additional reason in favor of meeting. But please, Felice, don't postpone it beyond next Sunday. Imagine I am a stranger who has seen you but once in Prague and now asks you a favor, which to you is a mere nothing, and to him is the one thing that matters. You would not refuse him. What foolish words! You would see the

necessity for a meeting even without them. But if you don't and can think of something that, in your opinion, is better, then tell me; I shall comply provided it helps to get us out of this predicament; anything that achieves this can only be good. Indeed, I could come to Berlin, but apart from the fact that it certainly would not be as propitious as Dresden—I am afraid to come to Berlin as long as things between us are not clear, I am afraid of the very sight of the first suburbs, I am afraid of the station platform where I craned my neck, I am afraid of the entrance to the station where I stood scanning approaching automobiles, I am afraid of everything. Not now! Come to Dresden! Let me be happy to suffer your suffering, instead of my own all alone.

Franz

> I forgot to tell you, my mother was delighted with your letter, it was quite unnecessary to put in a good word for you; she sends you affectionate greetings, she wanted to answer at once, I begged her to leave it for the time being. Now the most important thing is that we, above all that you, get things clear. In this my mother could only confuse you; let us hope she has not done so already in her first letter.
>
> Franz

*To Grete Bloch*

March 13, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, if your last letter had arrived the day before yesterday I could easily have invalidated its first section, which tries to discourage me without knowing my decision; today after F.'s letter and today's telegram: "impossible to come to Dresden regards Felice" I can't, at least not just now, though in principle it would be possible even today. But no riddles; I shall be delighted to be allowed to sit opposite you, to talk to you, listen to you, go for a walk with you. (By the way, how often have I imagined you lying

out of breath on the checked featherbed at the school caretaker's home! Even in those days Frl. Grete was a little perplexed but recovered and has improved steadily, though she refuses to believe it.) Well, tomorrow's meeting with F. could not be arranged; if it's possible to arrange a meeting with her for the following Sunday, but only in that case, would you, dear Fräulein Grete, postpone our meeting until the Sunday after? I have already studied the timetables. Wouldn't you be interested to see Gmünd?[14] It is exactly halfway, the trains practically meet there, both of us, you and I, leave home at around 4 and arrive at Gmünd at about 7, I not till 7:30. The following evening we take the same, merely reversed, trains back home. I consider this excellent, apart from the fact that I inflict as long a journey upon you as upon myself. Perhaps we can still find a place as suitable but nearer Vienna. Now it's your turn!

That you imagine you oughtn't to write to me may be justified by your way of thinking, but it doesn't do me credit, nor does it reassure me. To listen to a tale of suffering and to experience suffering are two different things, however much listening may force one to share the experience in any particular case. In a moment of great desperation, however, one can transform suffering into a privilege, of which one must remain worthy; but trust placed in one by a suffering human being to whom one also feels close is always a privilege and even a consolation.

Am I not right in what I say about Vienna, isn't it confirmed by the row you had with that employee? Yet somehow you seem to be captivated by Vienna, although you don't yet know what is best in Vienna, for it looks as though you still haven't read the Countess Thürheim. Incidentally, do you know "The Poor Musician" by Grillparzer? Haven't I asked you this before? Until you have read that as well as Grillparzer's autobiography, and perhaps his travel diaries from Germany, France, and England, there may not be much point in going to see the Grillparzer Room at the Städtische Museum, but when you have, I would be glad if you went and then wrote and told me about it. You are not to leave Vienna until you have done this, but then, hurry away.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

Has anything unusual happened in the last few days to make you so dejected?

*To Grete Bloch*

March 16, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, if you prefer to think that your last letter got lost because it said that you couldn't write to me because you were too miserable, then let that part of the letter be lost, but otherwise this had better not happen. Letters should be lost internally as rarely as they are by the post office.

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But I've been badly held up, and it's late. So now only what matters most, even if this consists precisely of those things one thinks of only when there is plenty of time.

Dear Fräulein Grete, you misunderstood my "I hope"; it referred to the necessity of a definite conclusion, not to the kind of conclusion. For the moment, however, even this hope has not been fulfilled; one letter has already remained unanswered, the second one will not be answered tomorrow, and so it will continue, but hardly for long. Now, of course, my attitude to it is not quite what it used to be, and yet—no, we won't talk about this now.

My impression of her brother is quite similar to what you imply, and F. loves him so much and was proud of him, at least I think she was. But this you will know better than I—what a tragedy it must be to have to follow such a person with one's love!

One thing that occurred to me during the last day or two: now that her brother has proved an utter failure, won't F. have to (or anyway think she has to) keep or at least largely support her parents? Do you know anything about this? Her father is old and won't be able to go on working much longer; perhaps he has also had to take over his son's liabilities in some way—don't you think this may be a possible explanation (not the only one, by no means

the only one!) for F.'s behavior? This would be an obstacle which I cannot regard as insuperable at present, but which would become altogether insuperable if and for as long as it is kept secret.

Enough for today, it's too late and I want to mail the letter in order to prevent you from abandoning yourself to false—and to me annoying—feelings of relief at the loss of letters.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

March 17, 1914

No, F., at this time you must not go on owing me a reply, now less than ever before. Again I am without an answer to two letters, two letters to which the answers were obvious, the one answer at least—that we must meet and talk to each other frankly. And with trust, such as I have always had in you, and you far too rarely in me. There may be reasons for your not answering, you would not—at least that is what you wrote—torment me or yourself capriciously. None of these reasons, however, can hold out to the end; they are but pretexts, ghosts. Speak, F., let me get near these ghosts. What you said in the Tiergarten about your inadequate affection for me may have been true then, and may still be true; but other things were not true, as has now become apparent, at least your silence was not true. Now at last, F., do try to see what I am, and what I have become through my love for you.

Franz

*To Grete Bloch*

March 18, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, no retaliations, anything but that! Don't worry, I will write to the office. There were various reasons why I preferred writing to the pension, among them the fact that my first office letter remained unanswered, and from this I concluded that, in the office, letters are read in a worse humor, which is certainly true. Besides, in my first office letter I advised you so energetically

(energy utterly wasted, by the way) to leave Vienna that subsequently I was afraid, supposing someone else had opened the letter, that I might have been taken for a rival firm trying to snap up Frl. Bloch, which wouldn't appear so very improbable, after all.

That you confirm my assumption with regard to F. helps me to understand certain things hitherto incomprehensible. According to you, however, provided there are no further consequences as a result of her brother's departure, the family's situation can't have deteriorated very seriously, since he hadn't done much to improve it. But the idea of the trainfare having prevented F. from coming to Dresden is an explanation altogether too well disposed toward me; no, dear Fräulein Grete, you don't seriously believe that, either. The trainfare in any case cannot prevent F. from writing to say she can't come, and in fact by now it isn't just one letter, nor two, but soon it will be 3 letters that haven't been answered. Nor, indeed, is her mother a serious obstacle; F. herself has on occasion mentioned the possibility of a meeting in Dresden. No, no, it's not that.

However, I am now most anxious to meet F. in order to get things as clear and to be as free as possible to decide—F.'s letter which I mentioned to you offers me a far better chance to do this than I had before. So an hour ago I sent her a telegram asking if it would be all right if I came to Berlin on Saturday. By means of telegrams one can extract telegrams from her more easily than anything else.

But if I don't go to Berlin and you don't have to go to Budapest, we will meet in Gmünd, won't we? I definitely deserve that Sunday, not from your point of view, perhaps, but surely as viewed from on High. Just see by the enclosed[15] how well we are going to be looked after in future.

Your visitor on Monday, was that an important visit? Did he cheer you up a little? At about the time you were writing that letter I must have got out of bed to shut a window, for the gale shook the walls of my room. It didn't wake me up, for I wasn't asleep, but I wanted to be quiet. Then somewhere along the hall, or perhaps merely in my drowsy consciousness, some far-distant door kept banging.

You no longer mention your headaches; does this mean they have been driven out by means of a strict vegetarian diet? This gives

profound pleasure to your natural-therapy enthusiast who is so seldom free of headaches,

Franz K.

March 18, 1914

It is 9 P.M. Had you sent a telegram at once this afternoon in reply to mine, it should in normal circumstances have arrived by now. I have no idea whether you are at the office or at home, you don't consider me worthy of a single word. I didn't want to send a telegram to your home, as it might alarm your parents; but I shall have no alternative. I must try and find you wherever you are; that is my duty to myself, and maybe even toward you. You will understand, F. —if only this understanding had already been reached! Today I sent a telegram saying: "If you don't come to Dresden I shall come to Berlin on Saturday. Do you agree? Will you be at the station?"

That was my telegram. I have now repeated it and in one way or another I shall go on repeating it.

Franz

*Franz Kafka's mother to Felice Bauer*
[LETTERHEAD: Hermann Kafka, Fancy Goods]

March 18, 1914

Dear Fräulein Bauer,

I am in receipt of your kind letter and will write to you next week. Today I am just putting these few lines on paper to ask you to answer Franz's letters by return, for I can see how upsetting your silence is to him. He must not know about this letter which I am sending you today.

With kind regards, Julie Kafka

*To Grete Bloch*

[March 19, 1914]

Dear Fräulein Grete, I am certainly not asking you not to want to see me this Saturday; there is no need to ask, for I know very well that this journey to Gmünd would be nothing but a sacrifice on your part—on the other hand, though this Sunday is to be abandoned, I ask you not to abandon altogether the idea of a meeting, the mere anticipation of which has given me more pleasure than anything else for some time. I want to present to you a decent and more or less mature person, not the kind of person I am at present, the one whose beginnings (but only the beginnings!) you saw during your visit to Prague. Believe it or not, I didn't get an answer to my telegram, nor to my fourth letter (since Saturday). Your last letter suggests that you don't quite understand why I want to talk to F. Perhaps what I said about F.'s last letter wasn't quite clear. The reason is that this letter was perhaps not quite, but very much like a letter from the good days, almost the complete opposite of all that has taken place between us lately. Which is why it came as such a shock and now, what with writing and waiting, it is like being thrown back into the very worst days.

Incidentally, I am writing to her parents today, it has to be brought to an end, good or bad.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

*To Felice Bauer's parents*

March 19, 1914

Dear Herr and Frau Bauer,

If, in the intolerable situation in which I now find myself, I write to ask you for news, I am of course in no way referring to your last extremely kind letter which, in my seemingly outrageous fashion, I still have not answered. This is not the time to talk about it, nor do I know whether I may do so. At that time, however, you did not consider me entirely unworthy of Felice; on this, then, may I now base my hope when asking you to meet my request for news, very brief news, with regard to Felice?

The last news I received from Felice was on Saturday. Since then I have sent four letters and one telegram, some to the office, some to the apartment, all have remained unanswered. Not the slightest reason for this silence can be found in our most recent correspondence; on the contrary, after what had been said, answers seemed an inevitable necessity. As a result I can merely think about it day and night and imagine either that Felice is ill, or that some other serious trouble has befallen her since Saturday.

Should these misgivings be justified, and should you in fact be prepared to meet my request, then I beg you to send me a brief telegram. As from noon tomorrow I shall do nothing but wait for news, which is all I have been capable of doing for a long time.

Yours respectfully, Dr. Franz Kafka Prague, Alstädter Ring 6

March 21, 1914

The fact that mere accidents intervene to confuse our situation unnecessarily, that my telegram should arrive at your office on an afternoon when you are not there, that your telegram should be incorrectly addressed, and finally, as I now see, the fact that my letter to your parents should be delayed by one day (it was mailed on Thursday as the enclosed receipt shows)—all this is bad enough, but things between us have reached such a point that even the gravest accident cannot make things worse.

Today on receiving notification of your telephone call I could not very well leave the office, and anyway couldn't wait to hear as soon as possible what it was you wanted; besides, with unreasonable hope I thought you might be telephoning in order to rob your express letter of some of its acrimony—which is why I asked for the call to be put through to the Institute. That was a mistake; we haven't got a booth; there are always a lot of people hanging about in the president's anteroom where the telephone is, and as it happened one of the directors, a tiresome man, was standing behind me cracking jokes; I could have kicked him. As a result I couldn't hear properly, but above all for quite some time I couldn't even take

in the meaning of your words. After all, I had reason to assume that my letter to your parents had arrived the day before, that you had known about it before sending your telegram and of course before writing your letter as well. Thus, on the telephone, apart from the fact that I couldn't hear properly, I couldn't help wondering what it was you wanted, and why in fact you had called me. Moreover with the sound of your voice—and this, after all, is why I am afraid of the telephone—that passionate longing to see you came over me again; the simplest method for clarifying everything and having everything clarified, was to come; so I said I am coming to Berlin. Forcing myself to ignore every objection, to ignore the hesitations in your reply, ignore the grudging manner with which you agreed to be at the station, I entirely forgot what there was to answer in your letter received today—and said: I am coming. I hurried out of the office, dashed to and fro in the rain, thought it over, everything seemed so utterly hopeless, the outward journey I would have accepted gladly, but was so terrified of the return journey that I could not make up my mind to go. When I got home and found your father's telegram: "Felice well your letter just received Felice tells me she wrote yesterday," I soon decided not to go. I realized that your parents hadn't received my letter until today, knew why you had telephoned, knew that everything you said—including what I hadn't heard—had been some kind of reproach for my having written to your parents, recalled your angry words in the Tiergarten when in face of your continued semisilences I said I would approach your father in order to get things clear—and so I decided not to go. I have sent you a telegram to the office, and one to your father, thanking him.

Whatever I may say next, Felice, I do fully realize that a great, though to me still inexplicable, misfortune has befallen you and your family; I realize you are torn madly this way and that, and I also realize that you bear it the way it had to be borne by the kind of girl I love you for being. In everything I say, I am aware of this.

Today when I had read your express letter once, ten times, and more, it seemed as though you had not read my last letters at all. Indeed it is hard to believe that you have read the last four or five

letters since Saturday; how else would it have been possible for you not to have answered a single word, and how else would it have been possible for you—knowing I had been without an answer to so many letters as well as a telegram—to reproach me when, in a constant state of worry about you, I finally wrote to your parents (you hadn't given me your sister's address) to find out how you are. (Besides, during your penultimate period of silence I also wrote to say that I would ask your father, and, after all, there was less reason for this present silence than for any other; indeed it was wholly incomprehensible, nor did you make the least attempt to explain it. Nor can I understand why you thought of answering, and finally did answer, my telegram, whereas the 4 or 5 letters which showed my frame of mind far more clearly were simply laid aside.) However, it is not those letters I am thinking of now, rather of the letter I wrote on my return from Berlin in which I announced my mother's letter, which you could not have read either. Surely you don't imagine, Felice, that I would let my mother write so as to win my wife for me (if the merest suspicion of any such hope was lodged somewhere in a corner of my infernal head, I am not responsible for it); I let my mother write so as to get direct from you confirmation of what you had said to me in the Tiergarten. I may yet tell you in this very letter why I allowed my mother to do so.

Today you write: "Let us draw a line right through those discussions in the Tiergarten." That would be good, I can think of nothing better; but on the very next page you say: "You told me you were content with the love I have for you." Surely nothing could obliterate that line more thoroughly. Felice, don't you realize that if in my desperation I ever said anything of the kind, I could never ultimately accept it from you. In simple words what you mean is merely that you are prepared to sacrifice yourself because you realize "I cannot do without you." Am I to accept human sacrifices, the sacrifice, moreover, of the dearest of human beings? Surely you would be bound to hate me if I did, but not only that: if what you say in your letter is strictly true, then you must hate me already. Surely you are bound to hate the one whom you do not love enough to be able to share his life willingly, but who by some means (and

were these means no more than his love for you) can force you to share his life. Your last letter but one was friendly; I could see you were profoundly distressed; your words in the Tiergarten seemed to be words spoken in distress; when uttering those words you thought of nothing but your own misery; in your letter you gave me hope, indefinite, but all the sweeter to imagine. In this letter there is definite hope, but first the blow on the head.

Moreover, two further ambiguities are to be found in your last letter; in them I see the last and slenderest chance for my all but undying hope. You are still unhappy, still incapable of deciding, and besides you admit (in this case, however, an admission is superfluous) that you did not “tell me all” in the Tiergarten. I would be able to cling to these two ambiguities if only the rest of the letter weren’t so clear! How I long to! Do tell me, Felice: Why do you force yourself, why do you try to force yourself? What has changed since our walk in the Tiergarten? Nothing; indeed you say so. Then what has changed with you since our good days? Everything; this you also say. So why do you want to sacrifice yourself, why? Don’t keep asking whether I want you! It makes me abysmally sad to read these questions. I find these questions in your letter, yet not a word, not a single word about yourself, not a word about what you expect for yourself, not a word about what marriage would mean to you. It all fits in, for you it is a sacrifice, hence there is no more to be said about it.

I would quite definitely have been incapable of telling you to your face what I have just written; it would have been easier for me to prostrate myself before you and hold on to you forever. So it’s a good thing I didn’t go.

You ask about my plans; I don’t quite know what you mean by that, but I think I can tell you about them quite openly now. When I got back from Riva I had decided for various reasons to give notice. For the past year or more I have known there was no sense, no real sense, in keeping my job unless I married you (since we met, there has not been, and will not be, anyone else). If I did, my job would make sense, would become almost desirable. (I imparted something of the kind to Dr. Weiss and, as you heard in the coffeehouse, he

now positively insists upon it.) If I don't marry you, then this job—however easy it may be (exceptional occasions apart)—will become loathsome to me, since I earn more than I need, and that's pointless. There are a number of other things that I'd rather not talk about after all. All this I mentioned to my mother for the first time on my return from Berlin. She seemed to understand it all fairly well, but asked to be allowed to write to you first; perhaps she understood it so well simply because she didn't believe what I told her about you, and pinned great hopes on her letter to you. So now you know why I allowed my mother to write to you.

Well, Felice? I feel almost as though I were on the platform at the Anhalt station, that for once you had come to meet me, that I had your face before me and was meant to be saying goodbye to you forever.—On Monday I shall still expect an express letter, a miracle, how do I know what I expect. After Tuesday I shall no longer expect anything.

Franz

*To Grete Bloch*

March 20 [presumably 21], 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, there are only a few minutes left if I am to mail this letter today. Another letter has been at your office since Friday. I didn't write on Friday because I was too distracted. Today was supposed to be the decisive day. Well, it was decisive. Today, after waiting in vain for a week, I had in all 3 telegrams, one telephone call, and an express letter from Berlin. By afternoon I was almost ready to set off to the station. The outcome of all this is that today I wrote a long letter to F.—possibly, probably my last. The candor of F.'s letter today was almost complete. But let us discuss this at our next meeting. It simply cannot be put on paper. I derived more pleasure from your brief postcard than from anything I received from Berlin. You are—I am about to say something immensely stupid, or rather what I am going to say isn't stupid, but the fact

that I say it is—well, you are the best, kindest, and sweetest creature.

And so is F., certainly; this will remain my opinion forever and I shall never abandon it—this is equally certain. She just can't help behaving like this toward me and we must resign ourselves to it. Perhaps the force that ties me to her and that which keeps her away from me are one and the same. There is really nothing to be done.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

March 22, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete and Child of Spring, out on the Ring a huge, never-ending funeral procession is passing, one of the windows in my room is open, my sister and a cousin are leaning out of it, I have been trying to drag them both back in by their skirts but I can't, so I am sitting here freezing. (As if this weren't enough, my cousin has just exclaimed: "Do let's sing something!" And they promptly begin to sing.) No, I can't write now.

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There is a letter for you in Vienna, though not with good wishes, for how could I know that you are a child of spring when your thoughts are so often those of sad seasons. On the whole, though, it does somehow suit you.

It's awful how you get dragged from pillar to post. First to Troppau, then to Budapest, but never to Prague. Which reminds me, will you go and see F.'s sister?

In the letter I sent to Vienna I said that in reply to an express letter from F. I wrote her a long letter—probably my last. To this I add that tomorrow, Monday, is the final and probably quite pointless time limit. If by tomorrow, Monday, I don't get some utterly inconceivable letter from F. (inconceivable after the last letter and the telephone conversation, also on Saturday, a telephone call from F.), then we, F. and I, are free. Only F., however, will be able to enjoy this freedom at once and thoroughly; I too may be able

to, one day, to some extent. If I find I can't, so much the worse for me.

You received so many letters and telegrams? So you do have a great many friends and acquaintances, after all? And the "desired quarters"? Don't certain misunderstandings flow back and forth between them and you which cannot be cleared up by one who is totally involved in them, but which could either produce the good wishes or else dispose of the "desired." And perhaps you would tell me some time what your mother, for example, wrote to you on your birthday? Everything was "sweet and kind," according to you. Quite innocently I may be to blame for the fact that F. never wrote to you; on that very Friday, after she had a wrongly addressed telegram returned as undeliverable, she sent me another, then wrote a letter; she is also very busy, as well as worried about her brother from whom there has been no news as yet; "how nervous and worn out I am" is how this letter begins, and in the same vein did the earlier one; it's high time that the whip which, on top of everything, I represent for her, were withdrawn at last.

Well, you are certainly traveling enough now, possibly more than you want to, and certainly more than is good for you. I won't let you go to Gmünd as well. But if you are in Vienna at Easter and not expecting some other visitor, I shall probably come.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

March 25, 1914

Dearest F., in your last letter (how long have I sat motionless over that word, wishing you were here!) there is a sentence that is fairly clear to me from every angle; this hasn't happened for a long time. It concerns the apprehensions you feel about sharing life with me. You don't think—or perhaps you merely wonder whether, or perhaps you merely want to hear my views about it—that in me you will find the vital support you undoubtedly need. There is nothing straightforward I can say to that. I may also be too tired just now (I had to wait for your telegram until 5 P.M. Why? What's more,

contrary to your promise, I had to wait as long as 24 hours for your letter. Why?) and far beneath my tiredness too happy about your letter.

———

It is late evening. I won't be able to write of the most important matters today. The exact information you want about me, dearest F., I cannot give you; I can give it you, if at all, only when running along behind you in the Tiergarten, you always on the point of vanishing altogether, and I on the point of prostrating myself; only when thus humiliated, more deeply than any dog, am I able to do it. When you pose that question now I can only say: I love you, F., to the limits of my strength, in this respect you can trust me entirely. But for the rest, F., I do not know myself completely. Surprises and disappointments about myself follow each other in endless succession. What I hope is that these surprises and disappointments will be mine alone; I shall use all my strength to see that none but the pleasant, the pleasantest surprises of my nature will touch you; I can vouch for this, but what I cannot vouch for is that I shall always succeed. How could I vouch for that in view of the bewildering confusion in my letters which you have been receiving from me all this time? We haven't been together much, it's true, but even if we had been together a great deal, I would have asked you (for what would then have been impossible to do) to judge me by my letters and not by your personal experience. The potentialities latent in my letters are equally latent in me, the bad as well as the good; personal experience robs one of perspective, and in my particular case to my disadvantage. You need only recall some of my letters to admit that this, this at any rate, is not the way for me to persuade you.

Moreover, I believe that this immaturity of mine, these possibly happy, possibly unhappy fluctuations of my nature, need not be in any way decisive for your future happiness with me; you needn't be directly exposed to their effects. You are not dependent on others, F.; you may long to, or rather you certainly long to become dependent; but you would hardly give in to that kind of longing indefinitely. You couldn't do it.

To your final question, however, whether it is possible for me to take you as though nothing had happened, I can only say that it is not possible. But what is possible, and in fact necessary, is for me to take you with all that has happened, and to hold on to you to the point of delirium.

*Enclosed*:
One thing you must take into account, F.: my situation is quite unlike yours. If we were to part, or perhaps I might now say "if we had parted," you could, would have to, or at any rate would, carry on with your present way of life for the time being. I could not do so with my way of life; I have quite definitely reached a dead end. I am not likely ever to forget that it was you who made me realize this.[16] Never in my life have I had such definite signs to prove the absolute need for decision. I must tear myself out of my present life either by marrying you, or by giving notice and going away. Had your telegram not reached me on Monday, then possibly on Tuesday, but anyway by Wednesday I would have sent off an already prepared letter which I had reason to hope would procure for me a minor job with some financial support in Berlin; besides, I would have tried, without much ambition in that direction, to get my foot in on the lowest rung of journalism. I would have succeeded, of this there is no doubt. But that I should have succeeded in forgetting you and the lost opportunity of marrying you (it would, in all probability, have been lost for years at least)—this I don't believe.

I must close, or my letter won't catch the mail, and I cannot keep you waiting for my letters since I keep imagining myself sitting at your table waiting (which, of course, is quite wrong). But I shall be writing again in reply to your last letter. *But please do write at once, if only a few lines. Don't keep me waiting!* Look, F., if you want to marry me, don't allow your future husband's heart to have a spasm each time the mail is due and for a long time after.

You say I ought to come to Berlin, but surely you do realize that before I see your parents we will have to talk—I to you as well as you to me. Surely this is absolutely essential. Would it really not be possible this Sunday in Dresden? Your arguments against are valid,

but so are mine in favor. And after all, you of your own accord have several times in the past, and even the other day in Berlin, proposed a meeting in Dresden. You must at least have had some idea of the possible arrangements you could make. Try it, F., and anyway write to me soon.

Franz

On Monday I got a postcard: "Muzzi Braun[17] wishes you a very good day." It wasn't timed quite right: your telegram didn't arrive until the evening.

*To Grete Bloch*

March 26, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, I am afraid it is very doubtful that this letter will find you still in Budapest. Your postcard took more than two days, it's now Thursday—in short, I am writing to Vienna and welcome you on the table in your room. It's nice, too, to wait until the door opens and the weary traveler comes in.

I don't know whether it was as a result of Muzzi's wish, but in any case F.'s and my affair has taken a slight turn for the better. Did I tell you about Monday's time limit? I think so. Well, there was nothing for a long time, it was already 5 o'clock, I was beginning to feel like a man who has been granted his freedom, in the good as well as the bad sense, when a telegram arrived announcing a letter for Tuesday. Tuesday came, but no letter, F. never tires of keeping me waiting. On Wednesday the letter arrived, not a bad letter; this may be a new and good beginning.

But now, dear Fräulein Grete, I should like to hear something about you again. What was it like, the beginning of the new year of your life? The Hungarian beginning, is it pleasant? How are you standing up to all the hard work? I am thinking of Countess Thürheim, who was also in Budapest. ("Buda is an accumulation of tasteless and unsightly houses, with the exception of the fortress

which is a city in itself. Pest is rather better, but crawling with Jews and a meeting place for tradesmen. The streets are wide, there are even a number of pretty houses, but one meets many more animals than people. I reckon that one-third of the population consists of bullocks and pigs.") She, too, worked hard there (Volume I, 164), but on the whole was discontented. Since by chance, dear Fräulein Grete, I once brought you and the Countess together and now think of the two of you as one, I doubt that you liked Budapest very much. I hope soon to hear what it was like.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

March 28, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, only a few words today and my thanks for not having forgotten about me even in Budapest. I have only a few moments, spent the whole afternoon running around with an old lady from ancient Halberstadt[18] and now feel if possible more forsaken than the dog and the parrot who sit waiting for this lady in 7 rooms in Halberstadt. Not that I feel forsaken by this lady, not that at all.

There is nothing new to report about myself if this in itself were not news. Not a word from F.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

Did the letter reach you in Budapest?

*To Grete Bloch*

March 31, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, what's happened? Whichever way I work it out, I really should have had news of you from Vienna by today. Could you have stayed in Budapest till Sunday, or is it that you are overtired and ill, or angry with me, perhaps? But if you are angry

about something, it would be only right if you wrote all the more quickly in order to give me a chance to apologize as soon as possible. As it is, I don't know anything, just sit wondering and worrying, the more so since I know that you would surely have written to me had you been able to write.

Kindest regards for all possible eventualities,

yours, Franz K.

April 3, 1914

You don't understand my telegram, F.? I assume it wasn't garbled. It should read: "Could not answer last letter. Had to say to myself your sole desire is to humiliate me. What else could your last letter mean, what else was the meaning of the otherwise pointless, never explained intervals between your letters."

(Strangely enough, yesterday's telegram, though it appears to have been handed in at noon, arrived very late. I was still at home at 8 P.M., the telegram hadn't arrived. Then I went out and didn't return until 12:30, when I found your telegram.)

So you don't understand the telegram? Recall our last meeting, F. Surely no human being can ever have been more profoundly humiliated at the hands of another than I was on that occasion by you, though certainly no one could have asked for it more than I did. The humiliation did not lie in your rejection of me; that was your indisputable right. The humiliation lay in the fact that either you did not answer at all, or else left the few answers you did give completely vague, merely revealing a dull hatred and antagonism which was so terribly convincing that even the memory of our good times was affected by it; and I remembered certain incidents that could easily be interpreted in the light of your present attitude toward me. You said little, but of the little you said a lot still rings word-perfect in my ear. You spoke of the possibility (the possibility!) of your love for someone of the past whom you did not wish to talk about; you said you could never do things by halves and that not marrying me (I argued that this too was a half-measure since you allege that I am not wholly strange to you) was the greater half, that you would be unable to put up with my

idiosyncrasies, that I must finally and for heaven's sake stop asking for the impossible, that if it so pleased me our correspondence could cease, but you were also prepared to continue it (yet I knew as well as you did that you wouldn't answer my letters, which is just what happened), and there were many more such things. If I have forgotten some of them, they can be deduced from my replies. As a matter of fact, these replies also prove the acts of meanness of which I am capable. I was untrue to myself; I asked whether you minded my being a vegetarian, whether you could marry me without love, and finally I even had the audacity to mention the factory.

It should be unnecessary to repeat all this, especially since you were in an exceptional, though to me still undisclosed, predicament at the time. But you say you don't understand my telegram.—My first letter (since Berlin) revoked most of what I had said, insofar as it is possible and permissible to revoke one's own words. My humiliations continued; if in the Tiergarten you kept orally silent, you now kept silent in writing; even my mother's letter you failed to answer promptly. But there was an explanation: you had had so much worry. Yet even when the worst of this was over, you kept silent for weeks, left 5 letters unanswered. Wasn't this contempt? Nor with a single word did you explain this silence, although you knew how it made me suffer. Wasn't this even worse than the Tiergarten? Once you wrote: "If you are satisfied with my love, well and good." Even in the Tiergarten you didn't say anything of the kind. Once you wrote: "Everything I said in Berlin was true, true in itself, although it may not have been everything." But I have never been told what this "everything" is.

It should be unnecessary to mention this too, Felice; for then came a letter, the last but one, that seemed to put everything right. All seemed well, a definite promise of better days seemed to have arrived. Joyously I wrote back, I appealed, perhaps urgently as never before, not to be kept waiting for an answer, told you how, with an aching heart, I manage to survive the fruitless hours of waiting for the mail, appealed for just a few lines, if that was all you could do, for the following day—and waited four days. And then what did I get? Then I got your last letter, a few lines scribbled in a

restaurant after a meal, no explanation for the absence of a reply, the trip to Dresden (your prior willingness to undertake this trip not explained) simply rejected, your sister's whispered suggestion to be brief (briefer still! briefer still!). That was all. Could I contemplate a reply, let alone anything else, when in the course of four days one moment after lunch is all you could spare for me, when not a word was said in response to the contents of my letters, and the whole thing was just reluctantly and casually fitted into the pattern of your life! Didn't this revive it all, starting with the first step in the Tiergarten? Could I possibly have answered? Now do you see that I couldn't?

If, F., following this explanation, which is meant to explain not only me but you as well, you think I should come, then of course I will come at once. I would come tomorrow, Saturday, at 10:30 P.M., and would have to leave at 4:30 in the afternoon, as on Monday, like most days at present, I have some difficult and tiresome work to do. If you want me to come, and if you would meet me at the station (I would merely escort you home, you could be there at 11:30), then send a telegram at once so that it arrives by noon, and I will hurry to the station.

Franz

*To Grete Bloch*

[UPPER HALF OF THE PAGE MISSING]

[April 3 or 4, 1914]

surely your mail would be forwarded from Munich. (Might he not be coming to Prague?) And the excitement at the office is all the more incomprehensible. Your job in Budapest was not selling, surely; the representative who was sent earlier on must have attended to that. Are these people so pig-headed and mean? And for your immense efforts you got no […] to do, also have other […] and commitments, because—I am probably going to Berlin tomorrow, am merely waiting for a telegram to arrive tomorrow morning. Incidentally, you do me wrong, Fräulein Grete, when you

call my setting a time limit “inexplicable,” you do me wrong on this point at least. I don’t know exactly, though, where you think my wrong lies; is it that I set a time limit at all, or that I am *still* setting a time limit? I should almost understand if you meant the latter, but this doesn’t seem to be the case. But you have no idea what sort of letter it was that I answered with that ultimatum (which, incidentally, 12 pages long, was written on the spur of the moment, out of dire necessity).[19] The gist and main phrase of F.’s letter was: “You told me you were quite satisfied with the extent of my love for you, well and good.” I am sorry if you do me wrong, and of course this sorrow is in no way balanced by the fact that in most matters you have far too high an opinion of me.

No, I won’t forget about Gmünd, nor about Vienna. Besides, I have a number of things to tell you, and many questions to ask. If things don’t turn out satisfactorily now in Berlin, then this really is the end, and I expect to be in Vienna for Easter. But otherwise—how would it be if you went to Berlin for Easter and I got into your compartment in Prague?

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

> Did you actually receive (I am trying to understand more clearly your opinion of me) the letter to Budapest and the 3 letters to Vienna?

*To Grete Bloch*

April 5, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete—in haste and semidarkness—F. and I agreed on the telephone yesterday that (since I should have to have left Berlin at 4:30 today, and have a lot of tiresome matters to deal with at the office, at any rate a lot for my utterly depleted office ability) I won’t come to Berlin until Easter. Our telephonic understanding was pretty good as far as I could see, and as far as I am able to judge this invention which is new to me and which I hardly know how to deal

with. F. has already telephoned me 3 or 4 times this week; the telephone is on the 2nd floor, I on the 4th; I am called by telephone to go down, it takes some little time to find me, for I am not at my desk; instead, from necessity or simply to escape from my work, I am either standing with one of my 30 colleagues or sitting at one of my two typewriters; I then run down to the 2nd floor, breathlessly take a seat beside the instrument which is not in a booth but out in the open in the president's anteroom where there is invariably a lounging, listening, far too cheerful, and far too voluble crowd of people who can be reduced to silence with a kick if they happen to be standing close behind, but against whom one is powerless if they are a little further away and one is attached to the instrument; I find that even in ordinary telephone conversations I can say nothing owing to my total lack of quick-wittedness, and my preoccupation with this inability makes it almost impossible for me to understand anything (it is not so very different when talking face to face). Thus on a long-distance call I understand practically nothing and in any case have absolutely nothing to say, am therefore quite unable to judge. When F. telephoned one day about a week ago, I talked with what seemed to me a voice so solicitous that I felt embarrassed in front of the entire president's anteroom, yet F. wrote that my voice had sounded "terribly cross"—perhaps because at that moment an exuberant director was standing behind me tactfully pointing out that my mouth rather than my eyes should be on the receiver (and he was undoubtedly right).

God knows why my complaints about this minor misfortune should have grown to such proportions. Well, dear Fräulein Grete, I am going to Berlin and you aren't, so once again we shan't meet and that is much more serious. Yesterday I still thought quite definitely (even while on the telephone I thought of it, instead of telephoning) that you would be going to Berlin, since you haven't been home for such a long time. Are there no business reasons that necessitate a visit? Incidentally, I have been racking my brains about what those "private business matters" you have mentioned several times could possibly be. What's more, three important letters in one day really is too much (is one of them from the visitor who failed to turn up?). It

would be good if you could tear yourself free. Would an excursion to the Wiener Wald achieve it?

You are absolutely right in what you say about F. and me. I don't understand how I could have been so base recently as to persist in expecting you, who are not in touch with F., to give some kind of judgment. After all, apart from the technical impossibility of being able to say everything, whether I want to or not, I also falsify and withhold. Needless to say, since you are against it, F. won't be told a word about you. In any case, as far as particular events of your life are concerned, I have no more than a general idea.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

March [presumably April] 7, 1914

To tell the truth, F., yesterday while waiting anxiously and in vain for your letter (how many times have I waited in vain, F.?), I had decided, if your letter arrived today, not to open it. In fact the letter might have arrived on Sunday; needless to say, I felt impatient for an answer to my last letter, so I had already waited all Sunday as well. Besides, it seemed improbable that the letter would arrive today. Why today of all days? This letter that reached me today, which I kept in my pocket unopened for no more than a few moments, and which in spite of everything makes me happy (I don't see why; judging by the contents, it is impossible to see why)—this letter, as far as you are concerned, might as well have been written tomorrow or the next day or not at all. It doesn't seem to be prompted by any great urge.

My telegram, F., was not angry, it may have appeared to be on the printed form. What is remarkable is that my last letter struck me as angry; but since you didn't feel it, perhaps it wasn't, merely seemed to me to be. All I said in my telegram was that I had found it impossible to answer, whereas in my letter I gave the reasons, and in my summary became aware of the vast amount that still is not clear between us. Indeed, it is a vast amount, but perhaps one word

from you and it wouldn't be, perhaps there would be nothing left at all.

Don't deceive yourself, F., don't deceive yourself! The part your family plays in your last letter does point to some kind of self-deception. Don't deceive yourself! You needn't tell me whether you wished or didn't wish me to be humiliated; you should merely explain everything I put forward in my last letter; the rest would become clear automatically. This simple thing, however, is just what you don't do (it is no good postponing the explanation until our meeting, you know that in your presence I am satisfied, and am bound to be satisfied, with everything), so you probably can't. But in that case you must leave the interpretation to me. Should you in fact have wished to humiliate me, that wouldn't be the worst. After all, I assumed you did (but seriously, really seriously), simply because it was the most favorable interpretation from my point of view. The alternative, supposing this assumption to be wrong, and you didn't wish to humiliate me—I'd rather not talk about that.

Well, I am coming at Easter, not at noon on Saturday, but Saturday evening at 6:51, if I am not mistaken. Needless to say, I would prefer you to come to the station anyway. Yesterday, however, I learned that there is a possibility that Max and his wife will be coming with me, and probably Otto Pick as well (all on literary business), and it might be embarrassing for you to meet them all at the station. In that case we should have to meet (as early as possible, perhaps at 7:30, I shall be staying at the Askanische Hof again) at a place to be determined by you.

You want to get a letter every day, F.? As a matter of fact you could have one, without asking. But how does this request agree with the scene I have envisaged several times lately when half-asleep: You place my letters—unread and at any rate unanswered—one on top of the other; or else you fling them aside, one after another. This you shouldn't do, not even in my half-sleep.

Franz

*To Grete Bloch*

April 7, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, so things are better again? And you are really thinking of going to see the Grillparzer Room both for yourself and for me? I am sending the “Poor Musician” to act as guide to the room.

That you overslept is surely a sign of good health. I can’t oversleep, yet derive no benefit, for in spite of it I am not ready before 12 on Sundays. Partly from laziness, partly from indecision, partly in memory of former (though possibly not better) days when I could sleep till 12 and on into eternity, I lie awake by the hour and hardly stir. Even if I were Viennese it would probably be impossible for me ever to get to the Grillparzer Room.

Is there anything I could do for you on my trip to Berlin (you got yesterday’s letter, didn’t you?)—unless you decide at the last moment to come along after all? Whatever it may be, I would do it with the greatest pleasure and my greatest (though still not unduly great) dexterity. Perhaps a visit to your parents, your brother, or someone else? Giving them your love or good wishes? But not only that, just anything, anything.

With kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

When are you moving?

*To Grete Bloch*

April 8, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, your Monday letter and the little parcel arrived at the same time this morning.—But this offer from Berlin, that is a stroke of luck, no less! You absolutely must go to Berlin. Had I the power I would make this paper repeat the words: “You must go to Berlin”: loud and clear so that they would reverberate throughout the office and make your superiors next door sit up and listen. Whatever you may have gone through in Berlin, things I know nothing about, whatever turn your relationship with your family

may take (it's certain to be better than it used to be)—whatever happens, you are bound to gain by taking this job. As a city Berlin is so much better than Vienna, that decaying mammoth village; and since it is they who have approached you, you will return to your job in a better position; you return, as it were (these rare opportunities should never be allowed to slip through one's fingers), as someone who has proved herself to be in the right; at all events, in Berlin your work would be of greater importance and pleasanter (the farewells from your present superiors can be nothing for you but a touching sigh of relief); you will be able to travel more, which you enjoy; moreover, supposing you wanted to leave again, you can establish better contacts than you could from Vienna; in the same way that you moved from Berlin to Vienna you may in time move on to better places, which wouldn't be easy from Vienna, as you yourself admit; you were surprised by the pettiness and lack of understanding of your Viennese superiors, which means you didn't find it so in Berlin, at least not to the same extent; and now that you can make your own terms your pay may also be better; in any case, you would be living with your parents, and since you are obliged to help you can do so in a simpler, more profitable way, yet a way that is easier to bear, easier for all concerned. Accept! By all means accept! Write and say you have accepted and I will congratulate you on the telephone—to the delight of your superiors listening in.

But if you do accept, this may offer an opportunity for going to Berlin at Easter. This on the one hand would dispose of the obstacle presented by your parents' presumably trying to keep you there, and on the other it might be to your advantage if you called on the firm now. Well, you are bound to know this better than I do, but so far as your acceptance is concerned, if you heed only yourself, some momentarily overwhelming emotion, which in the loneliness of Vienna could not lastingly sustain you, might spoil it all. That mustn't happen. Accept, Fräulein Grete, accept!

I feel certain of your good wishes for my trip and not for the trip alone. This certainty has become so much part of myself that I am no longer sure how much I owe to it; it is not little.

The little parcel will be handed to F. just as you say. I await your further instructions in case you don't go.

With kind regards, yours, Franz K.

April 9, 1914

Well, things are improving, F., today I waited only 4 hours for your reply; nevertheless, it was still 4 hours. It is quite understandable that each should seek his own advantage, that I should want your answers by letter, whereas you should want to give them orally, for you know that when it comes to words you need not give them. But have you considered carefully whether this actually is to your advantage? The things you should be telling me, you should after all be telling yourself as well; whatever you keep from me, you also keep—at least I hope you do—from yourself. Really, you should not do that, for both our sakes you shouldn't do it.

Don't tell me I am being too severe with you; all the love I am capable of serves only you. But look, for more than 18 months we have been running to meet each other, yet seemed, before the first month was up, already to be almost breast to breast. But now, after all this time, after so much running, we are still so very far apart. It is your absolute duty, F., to try to know yourself to the best of your ability. For surely, when finally we are together, we mustn't batter each other to pieces; after all, we are too good for that.

This is not what I said that day in the Tiergarten. I admit it is only your friendly attitude that gives me a chance to think about ourselves, as well as the inevitable necessity to do so. But I don't have to admit, for it is clear enough that if you withdraw from me, I lose all capacity to think about ourselves; besides, there is no danger in that while you are withdrawing yourself from me.

You are right, I don't know why it should be embarrassing for you to meet Max and his wife. I realize now that I assumed it would be, simply because it would have been embarrassing for me. Anyway, that particular danger has been removed; I made a mistake, it was only Max who was to have gone, and now even Max is not going, as

he announced today. This leaves Pick. It would be better if you came to the Askanische Hof at about 7:30, but punctually, I beg you.

No, Fräulein Bloch is not coming. I like her very much.

Franz

*To Grete Bloch*

April 10, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, that F. hasn't written to you is, unless she has very good reasons—it was on the tip of my tongue to say that F.'s not writing on a matter as important as this upsets my whole idea of F., but now I prefer to say simply that it is quite incomprehensible to me. Yet I would be pleased if tomorrow I were to have a few lines from you telling me that F. had written after all.

So there is nothing you want me to do for you, and you don't want me to give you news of your family. The fact that they are moving (in April and at Easter of all times!) wouldn't have prevented my going there and wouldn't have prevented anyone's giving me messages for you. Though in order to have some advantage over a letter I should have had to tell a lie, namely, that I would be seeing you soon, and I'm afraid it won't be all that soon.

But if I agree with you that I ought not see your parents, then you must agree with me, and luckily you don't seem to be so far from it now, that you ought to leave Vienna. Even if it were only to indulge my selfishness which doesn't want my hatred of Vienna diminished by the fact that you are there.

Kindest regards! Have a good rest in the country!

Yours, Franz K.

*Franz Kafka's mother to Felice Bauer*

Prague, April 13, 1914

Dear Daughter,

Although we knew the purpose of our son's journey to Berlin, the glad news of your engagement[20] which we received today came nevertheless as a surprise, and we would like to have sent you our congratulations by telegram. But I know only your office address, dear Felice, so you would not have received the telegram until the next day. Our one wish is to see you both happy, and with all our hearts we hope you will be. We very much look forward to embracing you before long, so please propose yourself for a visit to

us very soon. We heartily reciprocate your parents' kind wishes, and while my husband and I embrace you tenderly in our thoughts, I remain, your mother,

Julie Kafka

Our children send their kindest regards.

April 14, 1914

I am sure, F., that I have never at any time taken a step which has left me as firmly convinced of having done the right and absolutely necessary thing as when we became engaged—both then and now. Certainly not with this complete absence of doubt. And you? How about you? Do you feel the same? Start your next letter by answering this.

Don't think ill of me on account of my overtired, distracted, absentminded, inattentive, and possibly indifferent manner during those two days. It meant simply that I wasn't quite myself, but somehow—perhaps without your wanting it, or admitting it, or even being aware of it—had become part of you.

Anyway, I am not trying to say they were good days and that it wasn't possible for them to have been much better. Our first evening together passed—on the surface and within myself—as I had anticipated, precisely as I had anticipated. I had known all along that I would be speaking to your father on the following day, and had not made it in any way dependent upon our discussions of the night before. I had not even made it dependent upon the hope of being able to take up the discussion again quietly at some later date. I have complete confidence in you, Felice, complete confidence, try and accept this as best you can. The fact that I asked questions, and will go on asking them, is due less to any need of the heart than to a craving for logic, not very characteristic of me. Of course this is not quite accurate either, for even deep beneath the logic there are springs of suffering.

(What does Fräulein Bloch imply in her telegram just received: "Heartfelt congratulations from your delighted Grete Bloch"?)

However, the nastiest, indeed the vilest part was that, except for brief moments in the street, we were never alone, and I could never draw comfort from you in a kiss. You could have given me the opportunity, yet did not do so; I was far too distracted to force it. The rights accorded to me by custom on account of my engagement are repellent to me and perfectly useless; after all, being engaged is no more nowadays than a couple putting on an act of being married for the amusement of others. This I cannot do; on the other hand it makes me suffer terribly. There are times when I want to thank God that we are not living in the same town just now; but at other times I don't want to thank God for it, for if we were in the same town we would certainly get married sooner, regardless of anyone's long-service anniversary.[21] But be that as it may, do try and come very soon. Perhaps your mother would add a few lines to your letter to my parents; she would then of course receive a most cordial invitation. Have you told them at the office about your engagement, and have you agreed with your director on the earliest possible date for leaving? Given notice to the doctor? Stopped work on the revue? Were you to grant me but one of my many requests, let it be this one: Don't work so hard, go for walks, do exercises, do whatever you like, but don't do any work outside the office. I will employ you for your off-duty hours, and send you a salary, as much and as often as you like. I confirm this with my signature:

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] Kindest regards to your mother and sisters.

*To Grete Bloch*

April 14, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, it would be nicer if instead of the telegram I were holding your hand.

In Berlin I got on neither badly nor well but in a manner that some undeniable feeling made inevitable. No one can ask for more,

and I know of nothing I have ever done with such determination. Needless to say, I am talking only of the inevitable necessity that existed for me, not for F.

I wouldn't have written to you today, Fräulein Grete, for I am very tired, had hardly any sleep in Berlin, had to use all my remaining energy for my work at the office today, not forgetting that I have several more hours' work to do—but there is one thing I can't tell you soon enough and that's this: Our relationship, which for me at least holds delightful and altogether indispensable possibilities, is in no way changed by my engagement or my marriage. Is this a fact, and will it remain so? I repeat, in case it hasn't been made clear already: All this is independent of anything that I and F. (so far as I, the bridegroom, can say this) owe to you in our affairs.

F. told me about an express letter in which you wrote that you mean to go to Budapest for 2 or 3 months. Did I understand correctly? How can this be reconciled with your intention of going to Berlin?

And will it really be possible for you to come to Prague (perhaps on business) when F. is here at the end of April or early May? Of course she would arrange it to fit in with you. Actually I wanted to prevent F. from mentioning this to you, since it might have looked as if it were not meant seriously, for unfortunately there doesn't appear to be much chance of your being able to arrange to come here. But perhaps a joint visit to Gmünd? Do write to F. about it.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

April 15, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, I feel an unmistakable and true longing for you. Today when I saw the posters for the office exhibition (June 20–29) for the first time on my way to work, I became quite cheerful. Does this mean you are coming? For a week? Lovely, lovely, lovely! And you intend to come before then, on the 2nd, 3rd of May and face the

long journey? Needless to say, F. will arrange to be here at the same time; I'll write and tell her tomorrow, you have probably told her, too. But perhaps the 3 of us could meet in Gmünd the way you and I had in mind. But I just don't know whether engaged couples can do that; non-engaged couples are far better off, they can do everything, and are not obliged to do anything.

What is this that has crept into your letters? You cross out a sentence to the point of illegibility and cut short a paragraph because it concerns you? I trust you realize the necessity of my last letter. You mustn't give me up, that's out of the question and I won't stand for it. Nor is there the slightest reason for it. And I want to know how you are, what train you have to meet, and what sentences you cross out.

According to your last postcard it seems you want to abandon the idea of Berlin again. There's no need to sit at the foot of ruins in order to enjoy the world, this one can do equally well on the Hundekehlensee,[22] and the further it is from Vienna the better. You don't believe it? I don't know what the "unconditional surrender" means, I deliberately did not discuss it with F.; but she kept repeating how your mother wants to have you around. And F. will be in Berlin for a long time yet. She doesn't want to get married before September. After all, that's almost another six months.

I remember now how I used to keep talking about a certain resolution that gave me strength, without disclosing what it was. According to this resolution, if I were not going to marry F. I would have given up my job here or, if possible, taken a prolonged leave of absence and gone to Berlin (not on account of F. but of Berlin and its numerous possibilities), and become a journalist or something of the kind. Now, Fräulein Grete, what do you think of this in retrospect?

"The Poor Musician" is beautiful, isn't it? I remember reading it once to my youngest sister; I read it as I had never read anything to anyone before. I was so completely absorbed by it that there would have been no room inside me for an error in emphasis, breathing, intonation, sympathy, or understanding; it really burst forth from inside me with superhuman ease; I was delighted with every word I

uttered. This will never be repeated, I should never dare to read it out loud again.

You were sad up there by the ruin in the grass? Nothing seems more natural to me. I've always been sad in the country. What strength it takes to become attuned to the panorama of such wide vistas! In a Berlin street I succeed in no time at all. And yet you were calm out there and inwardly at peace.

Kindest, kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

April 16, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, that was really much better. Of course I knew exactly what you were going to write, you have hinted at it often enough, you have tried often enough to wriggle out of the noose, which actually is no noose at all but only—well, at any rate I shall try to hold on to this noose with all my teeth in case you intend to free yourself from it. But that's unthinkable. And the letters? The past ones, of course, are at your disposal (the future ones not!), but why don't you want them to remain in my possession? Why in fact should there be the slightest change? Anyhow, what good are rules to people, or in relation to people? To this day I still maintain that I don't want any strangers around, but in the same breath I maintain that I shall be delighted with every moment you spend with us (today, however, this "us" is little more than a fable). If you are against it, F. won't read the letters; nor is it necessary, for by now F. knows who you are, or could know even without the letters. And if she doesn't know, then even the letters wouldn't help her.

Aren't you proud that they are so anxious to have you in Berlin? The idea of your exceptional business efficiency seems strange to me. I possess so little of this virtue that I can't imagine what it consists of. But I keep hearing about it, now in Berlin again; I believe it, of course, but in spite of all my efforts I can't quite associate it with the Fräulein Grete I am addressing, I can see it only vaguely, no more.

Why aren't you coming to Berlin until August 1? Why this stay of execution? Who in Berlin, for heaven's sake, has designs on your head other than to stroke it? Do come sooner! For instance for that, alas, great day which is called a reception in your part of the world, and which is supposed to take place at Whitsun.[23]

Frau B[auer]? Well, to me she is slightly sinister, I to her—very. She can make me out least of all; the others can, more or less, though only with the help of some misconceptions. I like Toni very much, Erna too, though I saw her for only a few minutes on Saturday evening; on Sunday and Monday she was in Hanover. Frau B.'s somehow suspicious eye was always on me, though had I been in her place my eyes would have been far more suspicious—which in fact they are, even in my place. Well, sometimes she thought I was ill, sometimes absurd, usually silly, and occasionally too sly by half; such an assortment of judgments doesn't make for a very happy attitude even toward a future son-in-law. Altogether there was nothing particularly likable to be observed about me; I was overtired, distracted, inattentive, and at the same time absentminded and overstimulated (one of my ugliest and most frequent states), quite unnecessarily flaunted my vegetarianism, ate only vegetables, couldn't have been a bigger bore, and only a godlike perception would have recognized the calmness and the necessity of my actions and my existence.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

April 17, 1914

Dearest F., I have only 10 minutes, and not even all of that. In such a rush, what can I do and say? First of all, thank you for designating August as the month for leaving your office, let it stay that way. I looked "terribly ill"; no doubt, I felt it too; for six months I have struggled hard to acquire this appearance. Looking after myself wouldn't help; the passing of time will help, and every day by which you bring forward the appointed date will help, and all the confidence you place in me and all the patience you show toward me will help, and the last most of all. We do seem to be (it is

dangerous to embark on these pointed remarks when in a hurry), we do seem to be outwardly diametrical opposites, so we must be patient with each other, must have almost godlike perception—given only in cases of exceptionally heightened human sensibility—of the other's needs, truths, and sense of belonging. I have this perception, F., which is why my confidence in our future is great. I tremble with joy whenever I think I see the merest gleam of this perception in your eyes.

Franz

Write at once, even if only a few words.

Isn't there something I could do to give Frl. Brühl a little pleasure? I can't bear to hear about weeping girls.

*To Grete Bloch*

April 17, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, letters to three uncles and one aunt have been written, so now I can grant myself the pleasure of writing to you.

It is nice that you are in such complete agreement with my plans for moving to Berlin. I do want to go to Berlin, Berlin does me good in every way. But it would surely be taking a great risk if I were to give up my safe job now. On my own I could have done it, or rather, I should have done it. But now, with F.? Am I entitled to persuade her to give up her good job to which she is so attached, in order perhaps to suffer hardships with me in that same Berlin? As you know, I haven't much self-confidence, nor has it been greatly increased by my past and my way of life as an employee.

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Late, late. Today the only thing left for me to do is to send you my kindest regards. It gives me pleasure to be able to do this every day.

Yours, Franz K.

So far F. hasn't mentioned your letter.

*To Grete Bloch*

April 18, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, after reading your first letter I knew at once what I ought to tell you: that fundamentally your view of F.'s attitude toward you is by no means as clear as you describe it in writing. Writing itself often leads to false formulations. Sentences have their own force of gravity from which one cannot escape. I don't even want to quote the sentence in which you summarize F.'s alleged opinion of you. It would make you cross. The sentence is by no means bad, it's good, like your entire nature; it is by no means as bad, for instance, as the vile terms of abuse that a short time ago when half-asleep I used against F. (who knows about it)—nevertheless, you had to withdraw it, if not at once, then the next day, and you would have withdrawn it even if F.'s letter hadn't arrived. As it turned out, a question I posed at 8:30 in the morning was answered by your letter written at 10:30. Even so, if you were to ask me directly for my opinion of F.'s attitude toward you, I wouldn't be able to give an entirely satisfactory one—not that this would be significant, there are other questions I couldn't answer either, many other questions.

As for the letters, it is only your present opinion that I am to burn them once I am married. Well, I am not married yet, and only when I am will the opinion you then have be decisive. So please leave them in my possession, at least for the present. You once gave me the pleasure of receiving them, so give me the pleasure now of keeping them a little longer. Incidentally, do you think that we, F. and I, could be a united couple if we couldn't see things in the same light, even over a matter of such personal importance to us as the contents of your letters?

You must also allow me my admiration for your business efficiency. If I were in your place, an efficient organization would become inefficient long before I became efficient. And the granting of a patent? If only I could appreciate that in all its detail! I have an idea that you took the trouble to explain certain things to me that day in the hotel room, but I have retained nothing.

You definitely should be in Berlin no later than July 1! Quite definitely. And quite definitely this will make you feel better from the point of view of business: even I feel the invigorating effect of Berlin, or rather I know I would feel it if I moved there. But after all, for me the risks are great, I have no control over my capacity for writing. It comes and goes like a phantom. I haven't written anything for a year, nor can I, as far as I know. Yet in the last few days I had a stroke of luck, equivalent to your receipt of a patent: a story,[24] actually my longest, but also my only story (written a year ago) has been accepted by the *Neue Rundschau*, moreover with some further pleasing offers. It wouldn't be so rash for me to go to Berlin if I had written anything in the course of this year, but, as things are, it would surely be a desperate act to drag F. out of her present agreeable situation into a life of such uncertainty. Surely you must admit that, too.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

[IN THE MARGIN] About our meeting—shortly.

*To Felice Bauer's mother*

April 19, 1914

Dear Mother,

Now the memories of those two days are beginning to fall into place, and today, calmly and definitely, I can thank you with all my heart, you, Father, and all of you. During those two days I really felt myself to be a permanent, really permanent recipient of gifts, and in the fact of your giving me Felice I saw the surest sign of affection I could ever ask of you, and for which I could never offer you sufficient thanks.

Everything else is unimportant. It is unimportant that you, dear Mother, may have detected certain shortcomings in me, and may discover further shortcomings, without being able to change them. None of us is perfect in our own eyes, how much less so in the eyes

of others. But that, dearest Mother, is not the first thing to consider; first and foremost, bear in mind that you are giving Felice to a man who certainly loves her no less than you do (in his own quite different fashion, of course), and who will strive to the limits of his powers to give her a happy life.

And now do come soon, everyone is looking forward to your visit. Any postponement would be pointless; every postponement makes me sad. Besides, the finding of an apartment makes it important for you to come soon. Should Felice hesitate, then, dearest Mother, do secretly urge her on a little.

With warmest greetings and kisses to you and everyone from

your Franz

April 19, 1914

What a joy, dearest, to be for once in the wrong about letters. Most certainly my letter to your mother should have been written before, yet I wrote it only today. I should also have sent the book to your father on Tuesday, but didn't send it until Friday. But firstly I am not at all punctual about letter-writing (my letters to you are not so much letters as whimpers and baring of teeth); my hand is heavy, and when, as recently, there is no news from you, then my hand becomes completely paralyzed and incapable even of packing up the book for your father.

Am I aware of the fact that I am entirely yours? I did not have to become aware of that, I have known it for 18 months. The engagement has altered nothing; my awareness could not be established more firmly. On the contrary, there are times when I think that you, F., don't quite realize how completely and in how special a fashion I belong to you. Just be patient, everything will become clear and we shall be the most united of couples. Dearest, dearest F., if only we had reached that point! This fleeting relationship of ours—a few Sundays in Berlin, a few days in Prague—cannot solve everything, though the heart of the matter may have

been solved long ago, perhaps since the very first time I looked into your eyes.

Our thoughts were at variance; I was under the impression that you would be writing to my mother, so I omitted writing to your mother. You say you would have to invite yourself. Why? Didn't you get the letter my mother wrote last Monday in which she invited you, and no doubt most cordially?

A friend of my uncle [Alfred Löwy] in Madrid, who works at the Austrian Embassy there, has been here, and I went for a short walk with him. Strange: it's late now, we walked about a good deal, Ottla as well as a cousin came with us, we met some other people as well, and now that I sit down after what is for me a most unusual venture (in the last few years I don't think I have been for a walk in the daytime except alone or with Felix, the other Felix), now that I sit down in order to write to you, I realize that I don't have to change my way of thinking in the least, but that you, and nothing but you, were in my mind during the entire walk—in the tram, in the Baumgarten, by the pond, listening to the music, eating bread and butter (I even had a bite of bread and butter this afternoon, one enormity after another!), and on the way home. Spiritually I am so indissolubly at one with you that no rabbinical blessing could bring you closer.

I won't give the announcement to the newspapers until tomorrow, for Tuesday. My director returns tomorrow and I don't want the announcement to appear in the papers until I have told him personally. You will get the paper on Wednesday. As you can imagine, nearly everyone whose business it is knows about it by now. And what did your friends and acquaintances have to say? Did many of them repeat what the hairdresser said?—Finally—and this is how every letter is going to end—I think you should come very soon. But when, F., when?

Yours, Franz

Please write and tell me at once about your headaches.

April 20, 1914

My dearest, I come home this evening after wandering around aimlessly on tennis courts, in the streets, at the office (on the chance of finding some message from you there), and now find your letter waiting. When there is no news of you I become incapable of doing anything; I was actually incapable of putting that small announcement in the papers although it would be possible now, since I told my director today. But I couldn't; as a matter of fact, it wasn't in the *Berliner Tageblatt* either.

I can't even remember what it was that kept me so busy the other day, it can't have been anything of major importance. Matters of minor importance delayed me then as they did today. What a makeshift life without you!

Of course Max and I meet—every day, in fact. On thinking it over, however, I don't believe we are as close as we used to be, at least at times. (At no time were we as close as when traveling together. Wait, before long I'll send you two little things in print about our travels, a fairly tolerable one by me, and another quite intolerable one written jointly by the two of us.[25] I don't make promises into the blue like you do with the letter for my mother, the advertising stamps for my chief, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, and your giving notice to the doctor. I too make promises into the blue; but my blue is not quite so infinite.) It is my fault that we (to be on the safe side, I repeat: Max and I) are no longer as close; he in his innocence is not acutely aware of it, has even dedicated to me his latest novel, *Tycho Brahe's Road to God*,[26] one of the most intimate of his books, a story of positively painful self-torment. But even this fault of mine is not really a fault, at least only to a minor degree. Max does not understand me, and where he does, he is wrong. Lately, in spite of my superficial loquacity (as yet you are not familiar with this vice, nor is it one of yours, which is yet another reason why I love you), I have become more and more taciturn, more and more unsociable; in spite of this inner urge to be loquacious, and even a more legitimate

desire to impart information, I cannot break out of myself; it is not actually shyness, rather a feeling of discomfort in the presence of people, an inability to establish complete, lasting relationships; I so rarely lose the detached eye (can you understand that?); I venture to claim that it is rare for anyone to have, as I have, silently from a distance, without being directly compel—— final interruption: 2 uncles have arrived, one from Triesch in Moravia, the other, an eccentric, lives here in Prague;[27] I must stop, but if only to prevent you from worrying about the half-finished sentence, worrying unnecessarily, believe me, we do trust each other, don't we? Well, to prevent you worrying, I complete the sentence ——led to do so, the faculty of grasping the essence of people so completely that it frightens even me. That I have. This faculty, however, is almost a danger to me when I am not writing. But nothing is a danger to me now that I have you, and for you too, dearest, there should be no dangers.

Franz

No headaches, definitely none!
Give the doctor notice! Come soon!
Get the trousseau ready!

[April 21, 1914]

A kind of madness, a malady, F., but when there isn't a letter or some short message from you, I can do nothing, not even put the announcement in the paper. Not that I am anxious now as I used to be; after all, we do belong together (as is proclaimed loudly by the *B. T.* [*Berliner Tageblatt*] and more softly but more definitely by my heart), and it doesn't matter if at times there is no news; indeed it should be a good thing if a respite from all your hard work were a real respite and not taken up with writing, but all the same—I won't put in the announcement until tomorrow, you will get it on Friday.[28] However, this is not a failure to agree, F.; anyway I feel the papers have little to do with our affairs. There is even something

slightly weird about the notice in the [*Berliner*] *Tageblatt*; the announcement of the reception sounds to me as though on Whitsunday F.K. is going to give a demonstration of looping the loop in a variety show. The two names, however, sit well and snugly together; that's good, and the way it has to be.

It's late; I didn't get the express letter until just now, 9 o'clock; in any case it didn't arrive at the office till after 2. Fondest greetings, thanks for the kiss, which I cannot reciprocate, for when kissing from a distance one falls with one's well-meant kiss into darkness and delirium instead of touching the dear, distant lips.

Franz

*To Grete Bloch*

April 21, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, I don't quite know what you mean by your description of your general attitude to people. You state it specifically as well as in general, but it applies neither in general nor to me personally, thus it applies only to one particular case that keeps churning about in your poor troubled head, and about which I know nothing or too little. So far as I am concerned, what you say is all wrong. Toward me your behavior has been so correct and above all so steadfast, swayed by neither your own feelings nor mine, that one might think you were not a separate person but my own conscience endowed with its own independent, good, and lovable life. You must believe this! Perhaps you are generally mistaken about your own character. Perhaps you disregard yourself too much, are too good, too heroic. It seems so at times. The number of people who have cause to be grateful to you can't be small. Do they come into the third category of your classification? In that case I'll take good care not to be grateful.

There wasn't a "drastic settling of accounts" in my last letter, there certainly wasn't, it was meant to be a grasping and clasping of your hand, that's all. And you know it. The ambiguity in your relationship with F. is not your fault, provided there is this

ambiguity and that it doesn't exist merely in my own eyes, which are at the same time both dim and overalert.

Did you decide about Berlin while on the Semmering? With your eyes open and not out of desperation? And so you won't be going to Budapest? And be in Prague on the 2nd of May? Gmünd would be much better; I haven't mentioned it to F. yet; there would be difficulties, F. is staying only a few days, and the day at Gmünd would be one less for her to make visits, and one would have to spend the night, leave her mother in Prague, and I should have committed one more ghastly folly; the trip could be undertaken only on Sunday, the one day when my parents are completely free—nevertheless, it would be lovely and free in Gmünd, and at least worth considering up to the very last moment.

If you should be looking forward to the "story" [*The Metamorphosis*]? I don't know, you didn't like the "Stoker." Anyway, the "story" is looking forward to you, there's no doubt about that. Incidentally, the heroine's name is Grete and she doesn't discredit you, at least not in the first section. Later on, though, when the agony becomes too great, she withdraws, embarks on a life of her own, and leaves the one who needs her. An old story, by the way, more than a year old; at that time I hadn't begun to appreciate the name Grete, learned to do so only during the process of writing.

Kindest regards (the adjectives must suffice, one doesn't send them off into the blue, it's not the adjectives that have to be right but the person to whom they are sent),

yours, Franz K.

April 22, 1914

My dear F., every page of writing paper used up, this scrap off one of your letters is all that's left. By getting engaged, you know, I thought I would provide you with more free time, but apparently I have given you a lot more work. A great pity! I have just had a very kind letter from your father; my mother is worried in some way about a few lines you wrote to my father. What a fuss! Come soon,

let's get married, let's put an end to it. The beautiful apartment I mentioned won't be available until February, and even that is doubtful. A beautiful, beautifully situated, fairly expensive apartment, with an equal number of irreplaceable advantages and disadvantages, is on offer to us until the evening of May 2nd. This means that you will have to be in Prague no later than May 1st.

What's happening about Fräulein Grete's visit?

Franz

April 24, 1914

The third letter to be started today. Your friend from Breslau keeps interfering with my letters to you, the friend whose name I can never remember, not out of spite but nevertheless out of some kind of necessity; I cannot even remember what he looks like, though I have seen a big enough picture of him hanging in your room. Him as a person, however, I can never forget; it's partly your fault, you have said too little about him specifically, and too much allusively.

I had no word from you today, which wouldn't matter; what does matter is that I haven't had a single calmly written page from you for nine months.

Thank you for your letter to my parents, it put their minds at rest completely. That letter made me realize once again what peculiar language you people[29] use. While cheerfully scattering around words like "terrific, gigantic, immense, nifty," you prefer to avoid the properly descriptive "very" and replace it by the indefinite restrained "rather."

You won't get a letter from me on Sunday, F.; don't be angry, I don't like writing to you at home; as a stranger to the family I was able to do it; when my letters were made fun of, the fun was not, after all, well meant; now only well-meant fun would or could be made of them, and this is just what I would deplore.

Your letter to my parents was disappointing to me above all on account of the date of your visit. What? You don't mean to come until the 5th? Why not until the 5th? Surely your chief is back. And

what am I to do about the apartment which with great difficulty is being kept for me until the second?

What melancholy messages I send you today! Allow me at least to kiss your hand, so as to hide my face.

F.

April 25 [presumably 26], 1914

Dearest F., there are two things you don't mention, although you know that for your sake (leave *me* out of it for the moment!), simply for your sake, I am greatly troubled by them both. About one of them, your brother, I have even refrained from asking questions. You once wrote that I would be told all about it in Berlin; I was told nothing, merely was given that one letter to read which made me realize (I mean the contents of the letter made me realize) how much of this subject, insofar as it concerns you, I repeat, only insofar as it concerns you, you have withheld from me. But you now continue to withhold it.

The other is about your friend from Breslau. I don't hesitate to ask about this openly, for if this ghost is still active it is bound to reappear even without being summoned; if no longer active, then even my summons won't have the power to raise it. Don't suggest that we talk about it, you were unable to keep promises of this kind before. Discuss it frankly, or tell me frankly why you are unable to discuss it. There are so many things about which one cannot talk and communicate clearly, because of one's own or one's hearer's inadequacy, so it is all the more one's duty to make oneself clear wherever clarity is possible. You are quite free to have the picture hanging in your room, but I too must be free to be in my room.

F.

With regard to the superlatives, you have slightly misunderstood my meaning. It's not the expressions in themselves that are peculiar; the peculiar thing is that on the

one hand you people choose these particular words—empty in their sheer immensity (gasping girls seemed to disgorge them from tiny mouths like huge rats)—while on the other hand you are in favor of dull, rather indefinite words; and so in a kind of gallop you do not in fact describe, but eschew any proper description.

The visitors must be giving you a lot of trouble, but surely some pleasure, too? To each his share: you are greeting the guests, I the ghosts.

I am receiving plenty of congratulations, though certainly not as many as you. I opened the first lot, but not the later ones; if they are destined to come true and we to be happy, they will be equally effective unread. The enclosed postcard is for your aunt; it comes from that man she professes to know.

So you are coming on Friday; I can take this as definite. It is the latest date, if you want to see the apartment. It is beautiful; if the weather is as lovely when you see it as it is now, then you will take it; if not, you will hesitate. It is far enough out, right in the open, surrounded by greenery, 3 rooms, 2 balconies, 1 terrace, 1200 kronen, a lot of money, actually more than we can afford. I talk as though I have a clear idea of what we can afford.

You wouldn't like to go to Gmünd for a day? I should like to very much.

Send me your sister Elsa's address! Was your mother satisfied with my letter? And have [Brod's] *Petticoat Government* and the Werfel arrived?

*To Grete Bloch*

April 26, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, all right, let's leave the decision open. May I, at every moment during F.'s stay, be allowed the hope of seeing you. So far these hopes have been quite futile, let's pray it won't be so

this time. F. still hasn't written about Gmünd. She is supposed to be arriving on the 1st or 2nd, of course I shall let you know the date.

So you are definitely going to Berlin. Is your present decision due to good news or bad? The decision to travel together, however, won't be left open; in my opinion we shall definitely travel together. I do look forward to sitting opposite you in the compartment, not in order to talk, for I can't do that, but just to sit there, nodding, shaking my head, squeezing your hand properly by way of greeting, and altogether being at ease. Lovely journey!

You are about to leave, so you can like Vienna. Don't forget the Grillparzer Room! Incidentally, I don't believe that one's sadness at leaving is due to one having loved the thing one is leaving. One's sadness is probably due to the opposite. One feels that the connections are severed too easily, also that others part from one too easily; the superficial relationships which were established in the course of time and which, because they have not been closely examined during that time, almost seemed to represent intimate relationships, now prove to be as insignificant as they actually are. Sadly one remembers the pseudo-relationships that were formed, and sadly one foresees the pseudo-relationships that will be formed. Indeed, one needs both freedom and dependence, but each in its own place, and one feels very uneasy on realizing that one has got the places mixed up. It has often happened to me; it doesn't matter, rejoice with me that you are about to leave Vienna. What did your brother mean by that remark you quoted? It is a strange one. And who are the other rare birds who are trying to dissuade you from going to Berlin? How little I know about you! And how much I should like to know! I am interested even in the visitor you had.

I could well do with the advice you offer me but it can hardly be given in writing. How can you advise me about an apartment without having seen it? And how can you advise me about spending my few kronen when it's quite impossible for F. to manage on that? But however worried I may be in other respects, this doesn't worry me in the very least. I lack the imagination. Or perhaps the pressure of other worries is too great to allow one more to slip through. As for the rest, I have never had so few headaches. And you? A short

time ago you were still plagued by them, are they better? Have you ever tried a vegetarian diet? And I expect you will hardly have time to read Thürheim. Will you be going to Teplitz?

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

April 29, 1914

You misunderstand me, F., I am not in the least interested in what you tell me about your friend from Breslau; I'm not interested in his name, or in his marriage; indeed, I'm not interested in him at all.

Well, you seem to have had some fairly satisfactory news about your brother. I am glad for all our sakes.

I had expected that by now you would have been able to name a definite date for your arrival. If you don't come on Friday we shall have lost one of the apartments. I wouldn't want to be responsible for taking the apartment without you, for the things you might like about it would have to compensate for the disadvantages that would arise from your point of view, i.e., the apartment is rather a long way from the center, you would be surrounded by Czechs, etc. So try and make it possible to come. I shall go and see a number of other apartments tomorrow in another, perhaps more convenient neighborhood, so that you can then choose the most suitable without too much effort. Yesterday I saw a 3-room apartment for only 700 kronen right in the center, immediately behind the museum that forms the top end of the Wenzelsplatz. The kind of apartment one sometimes inhabits in nightmares. On reaching the staircase one begins to struggle with a variety of smells; one has to enter by way of a dark kitchen, a crowd of children crying in some corner, a barred semiopaque window, vermin hiding in holes waiting for night to fall. Life in this kind of place is almost inconceivable, except as a result of a curse. These are not places where work is done, work is done elsewhere; these are not places where sins are committed, sins are committed elsewhere; they are simply places to live in—but even that is hardly possible. We should

not look at desirable apartments only—some time, together, Felice, we should see this kind of apartment as well.

F.

*To Grete Bloch*

April 29, 1914

What are you tormenting yourself about, dear Fräulein Grete? And in such breakneck fashion? How can you say you haven't been a comfort to me, haven't shown me continual kindness—I who, in my relations with you, always have the feeling that there are only two kinds of pure, tearless happiness, touching the very limits of our strength: to have a person who is true to one, to whom one is true; and secondly to be true to oneself and spend oneself utterly, burn oneself up without leaving any ashes.

Your letter is written at such speed; I don't understand it all. If you are taken on in Berlin, they must surely give you a chance to install yourself there; the fact that your family lives there is surely no one's business. But if you have to start work quite so soon, and especially since you are remaining with the same firm, there surely can't be any great objection to your leaving Vienna sooner, say a week before Whitsun. And, Fräulein Grete, in what frame of mind was that letter read, not written, the letter that is supposed to have said: Stay where you are——

However, one must take into account the possibility that you won't be in Berlin for Whitsun and that the person facing me in my compartment will be my father, to his sorrow and mine. Alas! Alas! And in Berlin I shall have to go through the reception performance all alone with my own two legs and hands! Without your help! (F. will be busy with *her* performance.) Well, I shall have to resign myself to this. And console myself with the thought that you will at last have escaped from the provincialism and hopelessness of Vienna, will rediscover your vitality and regain the natural pleasure of being yourself. Perhaps your situation is essentially not so very different from mine except that it came to you as more of a surprise,

doesn't suit you at all, and finally will have to be gloriously exploded by you.

The loss I suffer by your probable absence from Berlin at Whitsun could be turned into a gain by the fact that you and F. will now meet, after all. However, I still don't know for certain when F. is coming. I assumed she was coming on Friday, now I am doubtful again. I had a letter yesterday in which she said: "In the meantime Grete wrote to say she won't be able to come to Prague because she will be leaving on June 1st. But I will write to her again tomorrow." If F. weren't F. you should have a letter today with some mention of Gmünd. F. still hasn't said anything about it to me. In any case, the moment I know for certain when F. is coming I'll send you a telegram. It will then be your turn to telegraph: "Coming," and immediately I will run and book a room for you in F.'s hotel.

But I do see that this journey would be a confounded nuisance (here on Saturday, back on Sunday, there would be no other way?), not to mention the annoyances from which I couldn't protect you, at least not entirely, and so it would be kinder on my part to refrain even from asking you.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

Will you be going to Teplitz? Might the Berlin firm be taking part in the exhibition in Prague?

*To Grete Bloch*

[End of April 1914]

Dear Fräulein Grete, there is no other paper in the house. The better-quality paper has been used up, but this is just right for you; for I really don't want to write letters to you, but for a few minutes come as close to you as these hundreds of miles will permit.

Have I been misunderstood? No. And yet you don't want to come? All the reasons that are against Gmünd are in favor of Prague. If Frau B[aucr] is not well disposed toward you—I myself have noticed

nothing of the kind—then this merely creates an additional bond between you and me, but it doesn't present an obstacle to your visit. I for my part would be very pleased if you came, and certainly so would F.; she has already informed me of your visit in the most enthusiastic terms. I still don't know quite how to express it, but sometimes it seems to me almost essential that you should be present when F. comes to my place for the first time. From your point of view, of course, there is a good deal to be said against it: the long journey; talking to strangers, not many, nevertheless a few; and other minor, unforeseeable things. I don't want to force you, but I shall have to force myself to do without you. F. may come up with a good idea, she still hasn't said a word to me about Gmünd; nothing will prevent me, if she wants to go.

F. writes to me more regularly now, even if not much, nevertheless daily, except today, so far I have had no word today. Yesterday, however

Enough, it's late; incidentally, a few hours ago, just as I was in the middle of that last sentence, a telegram arrived from F., as if at the last moment, so to speak, she meant to stay the hand that had written a kind of reproach. It was too late.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

[May 3, 1914]

Dear, dear Fräulein Grete, in the ridiculous haste that attends an engaged couple being dragged from one place to another, including apartment hunting. But it's impossible, quite impossible for me not to send you a word of greeting today. The nicest and best thing among the nice and good things you sent is the picture of you. I realized that I had quite forgotten your face; it had wholly disintegrated in my memory since those bygone days, and the image assembled by degrees in the course of time was that of a person who

meant so much to me that I had imagined I could forget about the face altogether. And now, of course, confronted with the picture, this isn't true at all. I should be so pleased if I were to get a snapshot of you; if it were to be one only, I should choose the one of you sitting with the 2 girls. I enclose my twisted mug not as an expression of thanks, which would be absurd, but from an unrelated impulse.

No more today; I have a lot to tell you, to complain that you are not here, to be glad that you are not here. And since these mixed feelings would have prevailed even if you had come, I am really very sad that you didn't, I should have begged you more. We telephoned you yesterday afternoon, but your office was already closed.

I'll write tomorrow or the day after.

Yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

[Presumably May 5, 1914]

Dear Fräulein Grete, I now have the pictures, they are lying in front of me, the one with the monument is the best (you lean so wearily on your neighbor?), the "lonely road" is characteristic, the others are merely aids, no help at all, but I can assure you they are all very dear to me. Which lovely park are you in? At à villa? Rather gay on the whole. Are these girl friends of yours?

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Late, late. F. left today. I'll write more tomorrow. I am not unhappy about the short pieces, did I say so? What made me unhappy was merely that I was prevented from thanking you at once. But apart from that, not the "happiest of bridegrooms," not that, not that; only he who is also happiest about himself is the happiest of bridegrooms. No, no.

More tomorrow! Yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

May 7, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, whatever else I may be, I am certainly absentminded; what I like best is to roam around the parks and streets, one hand clasped in the other, come home, eat some of your marvelous fruit, rush off again, look for an apartment, rent a bad one, fear I shall never get rid of it, the one I like is invariably the last but one; I love the last but one before I can get used to the last one, so I practically have to be dragged from the doorstep. I was virtually shoved out of the first and best by everybody, including myself.

———

More failed attempts to get rid of the last apartment. Apart from the two places' utterly different atmosphere, both good and bad, they are exact opposites in character. The one I have taken revolves in a ¾ circle around the kitchen; the one I want to take and have known for a long time faces east in its whole length. Shall I succeed? The final attempt is about to be made. You will hear the result in this very letter. Exciting, isn't it?

Now, dear Fräulein Grete, what am I to tell you? Fundamentally nothing much has happened. Felice looks well, ah yes, she is in good spirits, and while here seems to have felt quite at ease. My family has taken a great liking to her, rather more than I like. There hasn't been the slightest change in F.'s relationship to you since you were in Berlin together. You say you are very observant; in this case you weren't, or you wouldn't have been surprised by F.'s silence. F.'s silence as such can't be judged, it must be taken as an indication of her character. If we love her, we must love her in her entirety, whether we like it or not, and we do. But I won't say any more on this subject, there's no end to it. Not for your sake, you know that, but for my own.

———

Luckily I have got rid of the apartment that revolves around the kitchen, but I haven't taken the other one yet, the immensely high, beautiful one. Many drawbacks: shabby wallpaper, high rent, no

servant's room, only one door to each room, etc., and while I was considering all this, some demon in the apartment next door starts playing a piano with such vigor that it echoes through the empty rooms. There's nothing I dread more than music anywhere around the apartment. So once again I walked slowly down the 100 or 200 steps.

What has been happening with you? Or was I mistaken in thinking from your last letter that something special had happened? Above all, the most important thing for me: Will you be in Berlin at Whitsun or before Whitsun? Will you be going to Teplitz before then?

It's striking 9, I must be off to the station with this letter, though there is nothing in it. Forgive me, I am in a slight whirl but have no wish to escape from it; it's better to go around in circles and dizzily hang one's head, better that than to lie flat on the floor.

Yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

May 8, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, it depresses me to see how much you suffer from the incomprehensibility of my moods, or rather from your own innate kindness. Certainly I should have every reason to be happy, and F. is certainly the major part of this happiness. A certain kind of incomprehensibility—and mine is of this kind—can become repugnant by its very incomprehensibility; but this must never happen where you are concerned. Accept my reasons without explanation, which should be all the easier when I add that quite possibly it will all turn out for the best. This would even agree with the basic rules of my life which I have learned from experience. Because so far I have achieved everything I set out to achieve, not at once, never without detours, in fact usually on the return journey, always with the utmost effort, and, as far as one could judge, almost at the last moment. Not too late, but very nearly too late, invariably with the last pounding of the heart. Nor have I ever achieved the

whole of what I aimed at; in fact, the whole was usually no longer there; and even if it had been, I couldn't have coped with all of it; nevertheless, I did acquire a large part of it and usually the most important part. These rules that one discovers for oneself are quite meaningless in themselves, of course; yet they are not without meaning for understanding the character of the person who has found them, especially since once found they assume over him a kind of physical dominance.—In any case you will be able to observe our happiness or unhappiness, for we have decided—and on no account must you resist—that once we are married you are to come and live with us for some time (and from the very beginning; since you have no vacation now, you will get it this winter). If I take the apartment I mentioned in my last letter, we would have plenty of room. We shall lead a pleasant life and, in order to test me, you shall hold my hand and I, in order to thank you, must be allowed to hold yours.

But the way they are behaving toward you at the office! It's really disgraceful. You should have had a letter from me today. Well, at least they are not making it hard for you to leave. Unless the girls will do so; you seem to have friends among them.

As for Hardt,[30] I can make 2 statements straight off. First, I don't like him. Earlier on, and this story, which I haven't read, dates back to his earlier days, he wrote some good things; he also translated Flaubert's 3 stories extremely well, at least so I thought at the time. But later he wrote disgraceful stuff, and continues to do so. On the whole I had no wish to read anything by him. The second statement is that I value everything you take up, and that everything coming from you thereby acquires value for me.

Is a family evening another of those special institutions? So far I knew only about the reception, and that takes place on Whitmonday.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

Incidentally, do you read French? And the Grillparzer Room? And Thürheim?

[IN THE MARGIN] Better write to me at the office. At home the letter on the table waits in vain for hours.

*To Grete Bloch*

May 12, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, so tired? And you intend to continue for another 3 weeks in this makeshift fashion which prevents you from sleeping? Surely that is far too considerate toward the landlady and too inconsiderate toward yourself. It makes me sorry, and annoyed.

It was very kind of you to go to the museum. I did not expect to learn anything new (although I actually did), but I felt the need to know you had been to the Grillparzer Room and that thus a physical tie had also been established between me and the room. One doesn't get more than that even by going oneself, at least not much more, especially in view of the exhibits having been moved around. Is the picture you sent me that of the actual room or the room at the City Hall? A lovely room, in any case, pleasant to live in, pleasant to sleep in, in an armchair at sunset. Incidentally, an old and unattainable desire: to sit at a table in front of a large window, to have a wide-open view from the window, and to sleep peacefully at sunset without feeling the burden imposed by the light and the view, to breathe in undisturbed peace. What longings! And how stupidly expressed! That's not the way it is.

Incidentally, after [reading] "The Poor Musician," did you yourself have the wish to see the room? He really was a terrible man; if misfortune could detach itself from us and go about freely, it would be like him, every misfortune would look like him, he was palpable misfortune personified. An incident from his diaries or letters: the engagement had been broken off ages ago, only the most half-witted relatives still believed in some faint possibility of a marriage, by which time Katharina was well over 30. One evening G. goes to see the sisters, as he does most evenings; K. is particularly nice to him, partly out of pity he makes her sit on his lap—the two sisters are presumably walking around the room—whereupon he

discovers, and later writes it down, that he feels utterly indifferent to K., that at the time he had had to force himself, that he would have been glad to have experienced the slightest emotion, but that he had no alternative but to keep her on his lap and then after a while to extricate himself again. Incidentally, it wasn't just pity that made him take her on his lap, it was almost a test; worse, he foresaw the consequences, yet did it.[31]

You did get my last 2 letters? I want to know where you will be for Whitsun; you asked what day the reception is to take place, which seemed to suggest that you might somehow be able to come after all. If only you would!

Imagine, I still haven't got an apartment. I am beginning to toy with the idea of renting no more than a 2-room apartment (in town all apartments are very expensive, but F. should live in town, at least to begin with). What do you think?

I have the manuscript of a new novel by Ernst Weiss,[32] as fiery and good as *The Galley*, even better and effortlessly consistent. Would you want to read it, and in any case would you have the time to do so in the near future? Hardly.—Once again: Do you read French?

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

May 16, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, your toothache obviously means that in Vienna you are not to be spared even this greatest of evils, but that from the moment of departure all shall be better. What other meaning could your toothache have? And why should you be meaninglessly tormented? At this moment I, too, am well aware of the meaning of insomnia and "expansion of the head," an awareness that I seem incapable of losing; so far, however, I may not have suffered the very direst form of toothache, and I read about it in your letter with the utter perplexity of a schoolboy. How, in fact, do you attend to your teeth? Do you brush them after each meal? (Alas, I am now

addressing the lady who, thanks to toothache, disregards politeness and formality.) What do the infernal dentists say? Once in their hands, one has to taste the misery to the bitter end. I think F., with practically an entire mouthful of gold-capped teeth, has relatively little trouble. Could you not achieve this state in a like manner? To tell the truth, this gleaming gold (a really hellish luster for this inappropriate spot) so scared me at first that I had to lower my eyes at the sight of F.'s teeth and the grayish yellow porcelain. After a time, whenever I could, I glanced at it on purpose so as not to forget it, to torment myself, and finally to convince myself that all this is really true. In a thoughtless moment I even asked F. if it didn't embarrass her. Of course, it didn't—fortunately. But now I have become almost entirely reconciled, and not merely from habit (in fact I hadn't the time to acquire a visual habit). I now no longer wish these gold teeth gone, but that's not quite the right expression, for I actually never did wish them gone. It's rather that they now strike me as almost becoming, most suitable, and—this is not unimportant—a very definite, genial, ever-present, visually undeniable human blemish which brings me perhaps closer to F. than could a healthy set of teeth, also horrible in its way.—This is not a bridegroom defending his bride's teeth: rather, it's someone incapable of expressing what he wants to say, who at the same time wants to encourage you, if there is no other way, and only if there isn't, to do something drastic about relieving your pain. But this too it may be better to postpone until you get to Berlin.

The appearance of my handwriting must be excused by the fact that two days ago I cut my right thumb very severely, filled a small bucket with my blood, and am now treating the thumb according to natural methods—no plaster or bandage, as a result of which the process of healing is 10 times as slow but 100 times more effective: no inflammation, no swelling, a veritable feast for the eye.

Perhaps I had better not send you Weiss's novel while you are moving. Incidentally, you seem to have misunderstood: it's only the manuscript, the book presumably won't appear until the autumn. Of course, if you are very anxious to have it, I will send it at once. So I shan't see you at Whitsun, but perhaps there will be another chance.

My Madrid uncle is coming on a visit early in June, I shall probably go to Berlin again with him, though for one Sunday only; so I shall see you then, will also introduce you to Dr. Weiss, agreed?

Have now got an apartment. 3 rooms, morning sun, in midtown, gas, electric light, maid's room, bathroom, 1300 kronen. These are the advantages. The disadvantages are: 4th floor, no elevator, looks out onto a dreary and rather noisy street. Well, you will be obliged (since you accepted the invitation, for which I kiss your hand) to get to know it all very well.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

[IN THE MARGIN] Is it all right to send Muzzi a picture book? How old is she?

*To Grete Bloch*

May 17, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, so what only yesterday I took to be no more than passing trouble has got so bad! You are at home, in bed? What treatment are you having? Pain, of course? Medicine knows no better than to treat pain with pain, which is then called "fighting the disease."

I didn't get your letter until today; yesterday was a holiday here,[33] there was only one delivery, otherwise I should of course have sent the manuscript before now. Now I shall send it tomorrow. Though with doubts as to whether the pain and the novel are compatible. But it is too awful to have a mouth full of pain and to have to spend hour after hour in this state. Do your 2 friends come to see you, and has the makeshift accommodation been redressed in view of your condition?

My chief has just gone to Vienna for a fortnight on some inquiry; I should like to have written messages for you on his back and made him march up and down Biber- as well as Glasergasse several times a day. But this would have been pointless just now, for you are at

home and only the maid could have told you that there was a man walking up and down the street with messages for you on his back.

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It's late. Imagine, today for the first time for ages I slept the whole afternoon, better than for the last 300 nights. I sleep abominably at night.

About the manuscript there is one thing I want to add (not for you, for that would be unnecessary, but to carry out my obligation to Dr. Weiss): you are not to lend it to anyone.

Kind regards and best wishes for a speedier recovery from all ills than anyone has ever experienced before!

Yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

May 18, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, with regard to your toothache which fortunately has gone by now—so that it's safe for me to talk about it, and safe for you to listen—you can't wrest my rights from me, though of course it's always true to say that to every sick person every healthy one appears like an imbecile, and in fact behaves like an imbecile. This applies particularly to doctors who are obliged to behave in this way professionally. However, there is no doubt in my mind that a draft doesn't cause toothache in healthy teeth. Healthy teeth don't even begin to feel well until they are exposed to a draft. And if the deterioration of the teeth wasn't actually due to inadequate care, then it was due, as with me, to eating meat. One sits at table laughing and talking (for me at least there is the justification that I neither laugh nor talk), and meanwhile tiny shreds of meat between the teeth produce germs of decay and fermentation no less than a dead rat squashed between two stones.

Meat is the one thing that is so stringy that it can be removed only with great difficulty, and even then not at once and not completely, unless one's teeth are like those of a beast of prey—

pointed, set wide apart, designed for the purpose of tearing meat to shreds.

It's no good, however. You still haven't been to Opolzergasse[34] (that is the name, I think), and are not going even now, at the season of fresh vegetables. When it's an impersonal matter such as the Grillparzer Room, you are kind and do it. But when it concerns you personally, you are not kind and don't do it.

I liked the idea of you forcing your way into the Lichtenstein Gallery.[35] For it shows that you possess sound and, in view of your character (I am being entirely objective, am not judging from my point of view) an undoubtedly well-founded self-confidence, for undoubtedly you would do nothing if it were ill founded. As it is, you are overwary of yourself. But on this occasion you said to yourself that the closing of the gallery was an injustice to you personally, that you, even you alone, have the right to see it, and so you insisted upon this right. For myself I don't know if I should have been capable of it; for others, yes. Not that I mightn't have been capable of persuading the man to let me in, but the entire train of thought that leads to this man could not have developed in me, at least not without gaps. Accordingly my situation on the whole must be worse than yours.

I sent the novel [*The Struggle*] off today. To your home. You needn't be afraid of Dr. Weiss; if there were anything to be afraid of there, I myself would have detected it by now. But I haven't found anything. He is a very nice, very trustworthy, in some ways (though only in some) a very discerning person, and at opportune moments wonderfully lively. F.'s enemy, incidentally. For your sake I don't hesitate to tear up (that's exaggerated, the picture can be detached quite easily) a Fischer catalogue, and[36] send you a picture of Weiss. He hasn't got such staring eyes; eyes accustomed to pince-nez open wide with terror when the pince-nez are removed.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

May 19, 1914

The weather is lovely here too, unfortunately one doesn't make the best of it, doesn't lie in the woods as one really ought to; on the other hand, one also doesn't make the worst of it by spending a precious Sunday afternoon indoors with Aunt Emilie[37] conferring about one's trousseau. If the completion of the trousseau were expedited in this way, or the occasion for its use brought nearer, then indeed no Sunday afternoon would be too precious, but since this isn't so——

This weather also makes the drawbacks to our apartment—which, however, I have definitely taken—particularly obvious, and the necessity for moving next summer almost inevitable. It may be perfectly all right in the winter: it is between houses, shut in, warm, yet gets plenty of sun and air. But at other times of the year it is rather gloomy around there, nothing green outside the window, just a rather noisy, rather dreary street; although it is situated in an almost squarelike opening, nevertheless one can see and be seen by the people opposite. As a result a piece of furniture, at any rate for the 2 rooms overlooking the street, will be necessary, which otherwise wouldn't have been. What is it? (Exercise in ingenuity.)

I shall get hold of the plans, even though my last drawing is wholly reliable. Their outward appearance must in no way deter you from studying and becoming familiar with them. Just try pacing the outlined rooms, leaning out of the window, etc., and you will get an absolutely clear idea of the place. You would get an even clearer idea, however, if you were to take a little trip to Prague and see the apartment for yourself.

Nothing is going to be revealed about the state of my finger. This you must try to discover from my handwriting. Nevertheless, I could write to your mother by now, and it is silly to keep postponing it.

One question in confidence (in confidence vis-à-vis your family as well as mine): I should like Ottla, who knows nothing of my plan, no one else knows of it either, to go to Berlin sooner, perhaps even on Sunday. After all, she ought to get some pleasure from the trip; but if she doesn't go until Thursday, and has to leave again at latest on Monday, and on top of that has to take my parents' place at the shop every day during the whole of June, it would really be too

negligible a pleasure. (Nor will she be able to come again for the wedding.) I wonder if it would somehow be possible to find some nonworking relative or friend of the same age who could spare her a few hours a day, or give her directions as to how, both profitably and pleasantly, to spend the day alone? Staying at the hotel and all the rest of it certainly would not present any particular difficulties. The demands on her self-reliance would not be unduly great and rather good for her. Well, this is the situation, and it is for you alone to decide, which is all the easier because, should you foresee too many difficulties, the failure to carry out my plan would disappoint no one (except me perhaps for a moment), since no one has heard of my plan. At any rate answer immediately.

Kindest regards, Franz

If you think the thing is feasible, you would have to send an express letter, for Thursday is a holiday here.

[IN THE LEFT-HAND MARGIN ON THE FIRST PAGE] You have forgotten about the *B.Z.* [*Berliner Zeitung*].[38]

*To Grete Bloch*

May 21, 1914

Not valerian tea, dear Fräulein Grete, please. First rule of natural therapy: “All that’s bad is really bad.” Although sleeping badly is also bad, and being awake after sleeping badly is worse (that’s how it is almost every day), at least one isn’t actually responsible for it while it lasts; it is one’s burden and one bears it. But deliberately to drink valerian tea, and while drinking it possibly even staring into the cup, with the twin hopes that it will soon be empty and will do some good, surely that is degrading. I sleep badly not because there is too little valerian tea in my body; there are 100 reasons why I sleep badly, but this one reason certainly does not apply.

I meant to tell you this the other day but forgot about it. Imagine, when F. was here I discovered by chance the main cause of the suspicion I harbored against you. (Incidentally, the suspicion couldn't have been bad in any way since it was the beginning of something so very good for me.) The main cause was your furs. I didn't know it at the time. I have already told you that, owing to my preconceived ideas of business efficiency, I imagined you all wrong; I was expecting to meet a big, strong, rather older girl. Nothing was right; nevertheless, my preconceived ideas could have adjusted themselves to reality. But it was mainly your furs, as I now know, that prevented this. It was not a boa; I believe this garment is known as a stole or something like that. It doesn't suit you, or rather I failed to notice that it didn't suit you, I just didn't like it. And at first sight it struck me as so conspicuous there, at the entrance to the hotel. Moreover, I have always felt a definite distaste for furs treated in this manner (stretched skins with a silk lining underneath). Perhaps it has something to do with the notion that nomadic hunters may wear their skins in this way, though not lined with silk. I also associate it with an idea of poverty and artificiality, this garment with fur on top and mere silk underneath, although of course I realize that the whole thing can be very expensive and that in any case it's impossible for fur to be both above and below in this type of thing. But just this flat-surface way of treating fur is distasteful to me; the sight of this flattened object makes me ill at ease, and has worried me a great deal in the past with my sisters.—And it took a long time for my idea of your furs to become divorced from my idea of you. In the days before we started writing to each other, I kept seeing you wrapped in this fur, you were playing with the ends (its very mobility and flexibility made it all the worse), one of which you held over your mouth on account of the fog. I remember my sigh of relief on seeing you at the station in a nice traveling coat, at last without furs, and you actually looked freer, cleaner, brighter. But by then it was too late.—Today, however, you could be wrapped in 500 of these furs and I would venture to relieve you of them all.

Franz K.

[IN THE LOWER MARGIN OF THE FIRST PAGE] For various reasons which I shall tell you about later, I am very anxious to hear your impressions of the *Struggle*. Didn't you intend to write a few lines to Dr. Weiss?

May 22, 1914

I am committed inasmuch as I intend to mail this letter tomorrow no matter what you say in your letter of tomorrow. Should there be no letter, then I won't mail this one, either.

What I intend to say might be attributed to, though in no way caused by, either your silence concerning my sister's trip, or your temporary silence in general, or finally to certain things in your recent letters. My sister's trip is of such minor importance that a simple but prompt No on your part would have dealt with it admirably. However, what I intend to say is quite irrespective of all this, mainly because, over and above all this, it is of general importance to us.

Needless to say, when sitting here alone at my desk I am less dependent on you than when I am with you. What I am saying here is by no means more candid, by no means more truthful, but is at least as valid as the things I say when in that dependent frame of mind. Both are true, as true as I can be. If you are anxious—and you are bound to be anxious—to know what I think of you when in my independent frame of mind, then, as far as I remember, you can best obtain this knowledge from the letter I wrote immediately after my penultimate visit to Berlin.[39] Perhaps you have got it, and can find it. I won't repeat what I said then, nor could I do so. Anyway, what was said then constitutes the ultimate basis for our relationship, repudiated by neither side.

I know this basis is not altogether firm, at least not expressly acknowledged by you, and this is what worries me. We may be holding each other firmly by the hand at present, but the ground under our feet is not firm; it keeps shifting endlessly and chaotically.

At times I don’t know whether our firm holding of hands is enough to keep the balance. In any case, I won’t be the one to falter.

F.

May 24, 1914

My dearest Felice, I am keeping the promise I made myself, and in spite of your last letter am sending you the enclosed letter. Moreover, it is right to do so; for although the letter was the result of an immediate cause, it is by no means cancelled by its disappearance, the more so since the cause itself has not entirely disappeared. Besides, it contains not a word I need feel ashamed of, not a sentence which in the main expresses anything but concern for you.

The plan with regard to my sister has turned out badly. Fully aware of the difficulties of its execution, I approached you in confidence. You thought it would be difficult, yet feasible, and evidently discussed it with your mother; you acted correctly. Likewise I acted correctly by not reading undivided agreement into your last letter, and expecting a more definite reply one way or another (in accordance, moreover, with your unfulfilled promise to write again). In any case I wouldn’t have sent my sister on the strength of your last letter. That was all perfectly correct. Then, however, your mother writes to my mother (a most cordial letter, by the way, and to me a painful reminder that I still haven’t written) and declares—I cannot remember the exact wording—that she too would have liked Ottla to have come sooner but had not ventured to ask her, etc. So this little affair—which, if it wasn’t going to succeed, ought to have been no one’s concern but mine and yours—has now turned into a family affair. This is not right. I alone asked, I alone could be refused. Surely this is perfectly obvious.

Now, and not entirely without my approval, Ottla is defiant and doesn’t want to go at all. I don’t think that’s a bad thing; if on the occasion of my engagement she cannot enjoy a prolonged stay in Berlin, she should at least enjoy her defiance. Needless to say, her

defiance is directed in no way against you and your family, but mainly against her father. But this leads us into the gloom of family affairs, where everyone is at a loss.

Since you mention the theater and possible visits to the theater, I have examined the playbill. I can see only 2 productions that would give me pleasure, nothing else. And as far as we are concerned, neither is possible. *King Lear* is on Saturday. Although I shall probably arrive at 7, it isn't likely that we would go to the theater on our first evening. And *Franziska*[40] is no good because that is an opening night; one certainly wouldn't be able to get seats, and a dinner jacket might be required, a demand I am unable to fulfill.

I am also enclosing a letter from my uncle, which is meant for you, too. When I reach 60 I am unlikely to be in such a mood—although I might, of course, be in a deliriously happy frame of mind! Isn't he charming? Send me a reply for him if you feel like it, and I will add to it. Please return his letter as well.

Should someone ask you what your fiancé looks like, say you have taken a photograph and show them the enclosed little cloud. It really is me, and you actually took the photograph.

Franz

*Enclosure*:
*Letter from Kafka's uncle Alfred Löwy*
[LETTERHEAD: Compañia de Explotación de los Ferrocarriles de Madrid á Cáceres y Portugal y del Oeste de Españia]

Madrid, May 14, 1914

Dear Franz and dear Frl. Felice,

Your affectionate, joint, undated letter (happy people don't count the days) came as a delightful surprise; it sounds like a lovers' duet, and will be preserved not as a letter, but as a piece of music.

I repeat my warmest congratulations for your present and my heartfelt good wishes for your future happiness. May you never forget that each of us is the maker of his own happiness.

I would gladly have complied with your wish to be present at your forthcoming engagement in Berlin, but, alas, this is not feasible. As the time of my vacation approaches, more and more difficulties arise, and I now foresee that I shall not be able to leave before June 6th at the earliest; what with the length of the journey and a few days in Paris, which are absolutely essential, you will realize that I cannot be in Prague before June 15th. Don't be too disappointed; the inevitable has to be accepted gracefully.

Many thanks, my dear "new" niece, for the good opinion you have of me; in this respect you are far more indulgent than our Franz, who is critical of certain things in me. Not that I blame him, for I am not without faults; on the contrary—as one day you'll see for yourself.

I embrace you both with all my heart and remain your devoted old, and new, uncle

Alfred

*To Grete Bloch*

May 24, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, this morning your letter was delivered to my bed (an old and now pointless habit of staying in bed late, dating back to the days of my prodigious addiction to sleep!), then I spent another very pleasant hour there, mentally composing a reply. This one, in the heat of the afternoon (later I am definitely going swimming), certainly won't be either as full or as precise, especially so far as F. is concerned.

One has some convictions that are so deep-seated and true that one doesn't have to worry about a detailed justification. One's mind, moreover, is so full of them that there's no room for arguments; one wouldn't know where to put them. One delivers them only on demand, but of course, in elemental force, they cannot be compared to the ineffable justification. I don't have many convictions of this kind (which an outsider, needless to say, could easily call prejudices); two of them, my conviction of the abomination of

contemporary medicine, and my conviction of the ugliness of the fur stole (you call it a shawl?), remain to be discussed. As far as you are concerned, however, there is a difference between these two convictions. Valerian tea I dislike even if you drink it, but I have not the slightest objection to a fur stole if you wear it. I am being perfectly serious. (I don't even dread the garment you say is so awful, I am merely curious. Whatever can it be? A train 5 yards long? A dirndl?)

You are quite right, insomnia is also somewhat degrading. If I could show someone the present state of my head, a legacy from the past night, he would wring his hands. But I do know the main reasons for my insomnia, largely 30 years of a pretty unhealthy way of life. One could still do a great deal about it and much that would be effective, for instance go to bed early and at regular hours, but this I don't do. It's my fault and I have to put up with it. We both hate fake fur, why don't we both hate fake sleep? The second principle of natural therapy is: Avoid administering any medicament to an organism unless you know its full effects, which are bound to spread throughout this organism. That's why there can be no legitimate specialization, and every specialist who deals with internal complaints is a gentleman who deserves to be shot. Organisms can't be divided without being in some way destroyed. If I have a lump of coal too large to go through the stove door, the most practical thing is to smash it. But if I am to go through a door that is too narrow for me, it wouldn't be the most practical thing to cut myself in half for the purpose. Supposing I were made entirely of sleep that had gradually turned to nonsleep, I wouldn't hesitate to give this nonsleep some valerian tea; indeed, I would even fill it up with bromide or Veronal in order to gain sleep from nonsleep. But since I am not sleep but a human being as well, this process would be wrong.

[Presumably the continuation of this letter]

But today I won't be able to say all I have to say on this subject.

I know of absolutely nothing about my relationship with F. that you, dear Fräulein Grete, are not as much entitled to know as F., and even should know, I feel. The way you formulate the question:

“Before the engagement I knew at all times …, followed by a sentence (?) for a possible Yes,” I don’t quite understand. But if what it means is a question of what has changed in my relationship with F. compared to the days before the engagement, then I must give you the somewhat strange reply: Nothing has changed. Outwardly of course there have been changes, inwardly none, at least none that I know of or that might have been implied. You ask what F. says in her letters. She writes fairly regularly. But she is very busy at the office and the letters are confined to discussions about the apartment and that kind of thing. There have been only two really encouraging items: that she has finally given notice to the lady doctor and instead is learning to swim. They have had some fairly good news from her brother, it seems he has got a job he can live on. As far as I can see, F. must have done a tremendous lot for him.—I haven’t heard much more than that.

On the other hand I still have a great deal to say in reply to your letter, but am postponing it because it’s late and my pen is refusing to function. A word about the address because your inquiry sounds so urgent.* I took the manuscript to our shop in order to get it wrapped. I meant to write the address myself. But my youngest sister, Ottla (she works at the shop almost all day), because she is childish (she is 20, but a dear and good child), insisted on writing the address herself. So she wrote it to my dictation, but under a constant hail of abuse on my part because I considered her handwriting too small and illegible. I was particularly annoyed by her W in Wien [Vienna]. The parcel, however, arrived.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

What news will I get tomorrow? And why should Berlin make you silent?

In case you wish to write to Dr. Weiss, his address is no longer the one that’s on the manuscript; it is Charlottenburg, Grolmannstrasse 61.

Imagine, I still haven't written to Budapest, I just can't make up my mind. I am so lazy about writing, particularly to strangers. And undoubtedly it's very wrong of me. It is strange that both F.'s attempt, and yours, to bring her sister and me closer together has made me a little reluctant to write. But only a little, for my reluctance to write this letter is looking everywhere for an explanation. About a year ago, in answer to my request, F. sent me one of her sister's letters;[41] the 8 pages contained nothing but household accounts, and of the most trivial kind. It was almost funny. And the passage you quoted from her letter the other day was pretty fatuous. And yet somehow I do like this sister, but for the moment I cannot write to her.

May 25, 1914

At this moment my heart is beating with the fury of a schoolboy's after reading tales of Red Indians. I have been reading a few pages of Berlioz's memoirs. But this is not what I want to talk about.

Really, Felice? Time is passing too swiftly for you? Already the end of May? Already? Well, here I am, holding the key; if you like, I'll wind back the time. To which month during the past two years shall I wind it back? Tell me exactly!

You put me to shame, F.; judging by my handwriting, you say my finger appears to be better. Better? My finger has been all right for ages, and the handwriting in my last letter was almost my best.

You also sadden me. You're not very ingenious. What piece of furniture will be needed? A folding screen, of course, or a mat, in order to do Müller exercises. In order to do them naked, with the window open, and so prevent the people opposite from joining in the exercises.

I had seen the playbill. Yesterday's letter showed there was no possibility of my going to the theater. On the other hand, my mother and Ottla might well go. And if possible before Saturday, prior to my father's arrival, because the theater is not a thing he enjoys. It would be an effort for him to go. So it would be better to

take him to something else, to the cinematograph you once mentioned, or anything for which one can get seats at the last minute. The best thing for my mother and Ottla would probably be *As You Like It* on Friday. Otherwise, don't get any tickets for them, please, on no account.

Yes, Ottla has come to the end of her defiance and is delighted to come along. Family affairs once more, and gloom.

Where will they stay? I assume there are no hotels in your neighborhood, and if there are, they are bound to be unnecessarily expensive. So wouldn't the Askanische Hof be the place to go? My joys and miseries are so entwined with the place; it is almost as though I had left behind some roots onto which I could graft myself on my return. Besides, they like me there. On the other hand, it is rather uncomfortable, also fairly expensive; but—I stick to it—I still like it best.

In every letter all you need say to satisfy me is that preparations for the wedding are going ahead—although I admit I don't quite understand the magnitude of the work involved. By the way, don't forget! the thing that plays a far greater part in your trousseau than either furniture or linen is swimming. You promised to report any progress you made. Since you haven't reported anything, am I to assume that you have made no progress since you enrolled? I can hardly believe it. Besides, you will have to take a test at Whitsun. Are you being taught on a pole or with a machine?

You shall have the plan of the apartment. The fact that Adler[42] lives in the same house doesn't worry me provided the Lindström machines haven't been perfected to such a degree that they can be heard all the way from the mezzanine to the 4th floor. Unless, of course, the tenants on every floor were to buy his machines. In that case, I really don't know what you and I would do on top of that vast sounding box.

Franz

*To Felice Bauer's mother*

May 25, 1914

Dear Mother,

So you have had an accident, and a rather serious one. You see, you should have done as I wished and stayed on in Prague where there is no Elevated and where, if there were such a thing, I would surely have pulled your finger clear of the door in time. But now we shall all arrive in grand procession in order to inspect the finger, and if, as I hope, it is not too sore, we will try to heal it completely with an affectionate kiss.

With kindest regards to you all,

yours, Franz

Brief lesson in Czech:
[LETTERHEAD: Úrazová pojištovna dělnická pro Královsti Ćeské v Praze[43]]

May 28, 1914

At the office. There is a lot to do. I wasn't cross. I was furious, sad, and a number of other things, but not cross. (If I didn't suffer from insomnia anyway, it might have contributed to it.) For the sake of accuracy I must add that your not writing lasted not two but 3 days.

Always the same old story, the same all through history: Each of us chooses his own battleground. I shall have no alternative but to capture the other one as well. A worthy necessity in a worthy cause.

Within the next few days you can expect to be approached from 2 sides, apparently at my instigation, about the purchase of furniture. Once by the Deutsche Werkstätten.[44] They keep writing to me, finally I had to answer. Actually, I really do consider their furniture is the best, I mean the most suitable, the simplest. Secondly, a representative of a Prague firm will call on you. See that he is thrown out at once. He came to see me at the office one day; in my drowsiness I muttered something, whereupon he handed me his card, assured me that as an ex-Berliner it would be exceptionally easy for him to gratify your tastes, and left. Then, not long ago, back he came. He was rather better dressed, and my unfortunate memory

for faces deluded me into mistaking him for a well-known lawyer. Approaching him in the friendliest fashion, I shook him by the hand and—discovered who he was. (I want you to know that the firm he represents sells extremely expensive, highly ornate furniture.) Incapable of suddenly turning myself into an unfriendly customer, and since he asked for it in connection with a trip to Berlin (he will probably call on you on Friday), I gave him your address. What's more, he asked me to announce his visit to you by letter. Even this, to a man whose hand I had shaken in so friendly a fashion, I could not refuse, and am now carrying it out in this caddish manner.

Greetings to all, yours and mine,[45] and allow me to kiss that singularly sweet face of yours.

F.

*To Grete Bloch*

May 29, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, when you read this both of us, I hope both of us, will be in Berlin. It is very kind of you to come, very kind. Since I may not be capable of expressing this in words (your reservations about your dress are the same as mine about my silence, which is both my burden and my blessing), I hasten to put it on paper.

Your last letter but one arrived on Wednesday; it was not until I had read it several times that I realized, or thought I realized, that you must have supposed that this letter would arrive on Tuesday, that consequently my reply should have reached you by Wednesday. No, it didn't get here till Wednesday morning, and soon after, in the office, I got the other letter. If you had come to Prague I should certainly have gone at noon on Saturday and arrived in Berlin at 6:51. Now, however, I am doubtful and probably won't leave till 3, arriving at 10:30 P.M. My luggage will consist of insomnia, a queasy stomach, a twitching head, and pains in the left leg, but it won't weigh much compared to the pleasure of the reunion.

Just hurry, and get to F.,[†] regardless of your dress, don't try to improve it; no matter what it's like, it will be viewed with the, yes,

with the most affectionate eyes.

Yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

May 2 [presumably June 2 or 3], 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, only a few lines; this afternoon I had to try to make up for last night's lack of sleep, this evening take my parents' place in the shop—so there isn't much time, but enough to say the following: you cannot be fully aware of what you mean to me, yet the little of which you are aware must make you realize that in a situation which you don't by any means wholly recognize but which emotionally you are able to share with me to the full, you probably do just about everything one human being can do for another; and that this everything is always concentrated in everything you do, especially in your gaze, and has its effect; yes, its effect, Fräulein Grete, it has its effect. And now I merely kiss your dear hand.

Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*
[LETTERHEAD: Workers' Accident Insurance Institute]

June 4, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, traveled well, slept badly, back in the office impersonated an official's ghost after the cock had crowed thrice. It can be grasped in retrospect because one lived through it, but at the time not a moment seemed safe until the experience was over. I could think of little but that I wished to be felled by some nervous fever or something, to which I would succumb in sight of everyone, thereby gaining the right to let myself be carried home. Instead I dictated a long report about the expert opinion on the 5th Classification of Danger, and my typist, a pink, firm, young female, kept complaining timidly of feeling sleepy because she hadn't got to bed until (not until!) 1 o'clock in the morning.

Things are a little better today, I got some sleep. The worst or almost the worst thing is that I have so little time. Haven't I told you that before the holidays I started to write? (To which, by the way, your comment was remarkably wrong: that this wasn't the most important thing.) Now, after yesterday morning and this last rather better night, I promised myself I'd go to bed at 10:30—which practically puts an end to writing. And then there's the hour at the shop in the evening. No sooner has night fallen than the hour to proceed with the dictation of the report is here again. But you may be right; it is not the most important thing for me to write in Prague, the most important thing is for me to get out of Prague.

I have now read "The Legend."[46] (What pleasure one derives from the immediate fulfillment of a promise! Pleasure far beyond the actual fulfillment.) I like your brother better than this play. There are some good passages, certainly, also some surprising passages, but despite the quality of these passages and their capacity to surprise, I don't feel able to say anything positive about it. After all, it's no more than a childish piece of work, gathered together from here and there and making a rather flimsy whole. Odd that he should accuse you of effusiveness when he is capable of such effusiveness with mere words ("life in me began to rebel and let out a piercing cry like that of a mortally wounded beast," etc.—no, that's no good, or rather it's childish and might mean anything). Undoubtedly he will write better things, or has already. Indeed, he is sure to do so, for he gives the impression of being a very observant, right-thinking, confident, tenacious person, if a trifle too caustic. In fact, for someone wishing to be useful, these are the most essential qualities, as I am well able to judge, for I have none of them. Which reminds me, he really might have been more friendly in the way he talked to you at table, especially considering the look you gave him. But perhaps he was being friendly, and I am just oversensitive where you are concerned.

Franz K.

We are sure to have an opportunity to talk about Berlin.

[ABOVE THE LETTERHEAD] I am enclosing a little card I found in the book.

*To Grete Bloch*

June 6, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, yesterday was another of those days when I felt completely tied down, incapable of moving, incapable of writing you the letter that everything still alive within me urged me to write. At times—and for the moment you are the only one to know—I really don't know how I, being what I am, can bear the responsibility of marriage. A marriage erected on the woman's fortitude? Bound to be a crooked edifice, don't you think? It will collapse and in so doing rip the foundations from the earth.

Oh God, I did understand what you meant, Fräulein Grete, by your evaluation of my writing. But even if understood, your opinion is not correct, even though it is being considered. Each of us has his own way of emerging from the underworld, mine is by writing. That's why the only way I can keep going, if at all, is by writing, not through rest and sleep. I am far more likely to achieve peace of mind through writing than the capacity to write through peace.

But I keep talking about myself, which in itself is an indication of the state I am in. I think this is what I did in Berlin as well, although I surely ought to have known that I am visible and alive only when I suppress as much as possible all things concerning myself.

I am glad, despite your assertion to the contrary, and not only because it confirms my prediction, that you do feel better in Berlin than you did in Vienna. You feel better. You have a better job, prefer your work (there is no longer a "pigsty"), have your family with you, are not assailed by tormenting thoughts that arise from being far away; Berlin helps to sustain you as it does everyone else. What do you mean by your mother being "too attentive"?

I didn't mean to include you in what I said about your brother. Had I meant to, I should have to have added a number of things which I can't put into words and which, if I found the words, I wouldn't put on paper. But you may be right, and you may have a

great deal in common which, as far as your brother is concerned, I of course am unable to see. In this sense perhaps “The Legend” contains possibilities that escape me. What little there is about the Jewish villagers, for example, gives an impression of truth, but it is a universal Zionist yearning, and in this first slight attempt within reach of all who have joined the ranks. Nevertheless, I do appreciate what there is. But I can’t get over the dryness of the entire allegory, which is nothing but an allegory, which says all there is to say without ever delving deeper or drawing one deeper into it. But you mentioned your brother’s short stories. Undoubtedly these would be more characteristic, for in “The Legend” he is limited by the allegory; elsewhere he is bound to be more free, more open, and can be judged with greater certainty. After all, a piece of work like “The Legend” can succeed only toward the end of one’s life when all one’s faculties have developed and are at one’s disposal, and one can venture consciously to force them to extend over the entire span of one’s work without feeling deserted by most of them after the first few steps. Which is just what happened to your brother, although his determination prevented him from being discouraged by it.

Kindest regards, an affectionate handshake. Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

June 8, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, was my letter really so heartrending? Well, things are not quite as bad, at least not permanently as bad. Everything piles up when one sits down to write, and nothing wants to be left out because the letter is addressed to you, and you will give the right and kind answer to everything. Then I am left with the consolation that I have not really told you everything, and so have the right to drink in the comfort that your letters bring.

In July I shall move somewhere into the woods and try to improve myself as best I can in the short time. Parents here are in the habit of saying that it’s the children who make one realize how old one is getting. If one has no children, it’s one’s ghosts that make

one realize it, and they do it all the more thoroughly. I know that when I was young I tried to lure them out, they barely showed themselves; I tried harder, I was bored without them, they wouldn't come, and I began to think they would never come. For this reason I was often on the point of cursing my life. Later on they did appear, only now and then, always as exalted visitors, one had to bow to them though they were still very small; quite often it wasn't them at all, it merely looked or sounded as if it were. But when they did come they were seldom fierce, one couldn't be very proud of them, at best they pounced on one like the lion cub on the bitch; they did bite, but this was noticeable only if one placed one's finger on the bitten spot and pressed hard with one's fingernail. Later, however, they grew bigger, they came and stayed at will, delicate birds' backs turned into the backs of monumental giants, they came in through every door, forcing those that were shut; huge, bony ghosts they were, nameless in their multitude; a single ghost could be fought, but not all those by which one was surrounded. If one were writing, they were all benevolent spirits; when not writing, they were demons, and pressed so close that all one could do was raise a hand to declare one's presence. Presumably one was not responsible for the way one strained the raised hand.——

The fact that things are better for you now is such well-deserved good fortune that one should accept it entirely as a matter of course. How you must have suffered in recent months, while I kept writing of nothing but myself, and at first even deceitfully! Of course I have no knowledge of your domestic misfortunes, but don't you think that whatever tormented you, and still torments you in this respect, produced the positive reactions which stand you in such good stead now that you are facing the world? Incidentally, I don't know [Strindberg's] *Dance of Death*, and don't know what you are implying; doesn't it take place in a lighthouse?

I meant to tell you not to exert yourself by writing to me, and to leave your office earlier. A few lines are enough for me, though I do need those. Two sentences and your signature are enough. And forgive me if I complain too much. After all, everything is bearable, and if the pain remains, the days do change, the expression of the

pain changes, one's powers of resistance change, and then one is carried along more or less alive on the waves of change.

Franz K.

[IN THE MARGIN] I didn't get a postcard written on Sunday.

*To Grete Bloch*

June 11, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, a strange, a thoroughly strange letter.

You say you don't believe that things have improved, but without being "able to give the reasons," thereby increasing—unintentionally, of course—my anxiety. As a matter of fact, given my nature, this would be the best way of dispelling my fears, provided there were no visible yet inscrutable reasons for extreme disquiet.

But then, in contradiction to your first sentence, you say you don't believe in the inevitability of my predicament. Now please disregard the recognizable characteristics that distinguish me as an individual, and take the whole as a typical case. Owing to circumstances as well as to his own temperament, a completely antisocial man in an indifferent state of health hard to determine at the moment, excluded from every great soul-sustaining community on account of his non-Zionist (I admire Zionism and am nauseated by it), nonpracticing Judaism; the most precious part of his nature continually and most agonizingly upset by the enforced labor of his office—a man of this kind, certainly under the deepest inner compulsion, decides to get married—to undertake, in other words, the most social of acts. For a man of this kind, that strikes me as no mean venture.

And finally your letter included this insult which, as such, happened to give me great pleasure: "surely you'll be able to survive another 3 months." But Fräulein Grete, if one says that 3 months is

too long, thereby one says equally that it is too short. And that's what it is.

The other day you asked after Ottla. She is well, despite spending the whole day at the shop. For her mind is not on the shop, but entirely on the Institute for the Blind where for some weeks now, particularly during the past fortnight, she has made a number of friends, one especially good friend—a young basket-weaver whose one eye is closed and the other enormously swollen. He is her special friend, is gentle, understanding, and faithful. She goes to see him on Sundays and holidays and reads to him, amusing things whenever possible. No doubt a somewhat dangerous and painful pleasure. For what is normally expressed by the eyes, the blind use their fingertips. They finger her dress, take hold of her sleeve, stroke her hands, and this big strong girl—whom I have unfortunately, if not deliberately, led slightly astray—calls this her greatest joy. She says she wakes up happy and cannot think why—until suddenly she remembers the blind. Spends the whole week collecting cigars and cigarettes (economizing on her food) so as to hand them to the blind on Sunday, has even managed to acquire an old cigar case which she is going to take them today. She has no contact with the blind girls, nor for that matter have her blind friends any contact with the blind girls who are, as they say, too haughty. "Our female charges are too haughty."

Thanks to these activities, Ottla still hasn't written to Berlin. She doesn't know how to address them. I agree, she can't say "Dear parents." Nor can she say "My dears," for this mode of address is invariably used by an old, widowed, rather sugary, very worthy, yet somewhat illiterate, physically vast aunt suffering from disagreeable pains which no one believes in, and from whom the expression "My dears," which is hers, would virtually have to be snatched. Can't you suggest anything?

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

[IN THE MARGIN] I never got the postcard of the Schlossbrücke. What did it say?

*To Grete Bloch*

June 14, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, first of all I was neither annoyed nor had I any reason to be; at most I could be annoyed (and needless to say, even then only with myself) that my last letter failed to convince you of this. More likely it was my morbid irritability (a single really bad night can produce this, for in my present state I depend on every single night, every single chance of sleep. Today again I shall have to be careful, for to all outward appearances last night was like the criminal's first night after the crime. Continually starting up and dozing off again between short prayers. In between, however, there have been some better nights), so probably it was my irritability that made me almost deliberately read things that were not in your letter, and which, even if they had been, could not have belied their origin—your good, generous heart. But somehow it gave me pleasure to let you insult me, if only in my imagination, and I was sufficiently annoyed to yield to this temptation.

On the whole you interpret my "confession" correctly, and consequently your surprise is equally correct. What you don't quite grasp is the heart of the "confession," and this (with certain limitations and disregard for detail) is very simple, only too simple. Because among the points mentioned there is one that (Ottla has just been here and distracted me with stories of her blind friend to whom she is about to take a bunch of roses) dominates them all. Which is, as you will soon see, my state of health, which you call "nothing." If I were healthier and stronger, all difficulties would have been overcome, I would have left the office long ago, I would be quite sure of F. and sure of the whole world; whatever might still be lacking I could replace with my health, whereas now I have to refer everything to my lack of health. Shall I say more about this? This state of health is also deceptive, it deceives even me; at any

moment I am liable to be assailed by the most detailed and precise imaginings and invariably on the most inconvenient occasions. Undoubtedly an enormous hypochondria, which however has struck so many and such deep roots within me that I stand or fall with it. You consider my “obstinacy” a good sign. There is some truth in this. Obstinacy, however, can also be the result of despair.

My state of health is on one side of the scales, everything else I have mentioned is on the other. There is a moment when the whole thing trembles in the balance and waits for a decision. Either my health has sufficient weight to raise the other side of the scales, thereby allowing everything on it to evaporate, or it fails to hold its own, is raised in its turn, and is then heated by the contents of the other side until a veritable ghost is hatched.

I had heard of Aunt E[milie]’s illness only from you. On the other hand, I am well aware that I still haven’t written to Erna, that I ought to, and even want to. (At moments Erna struck me as almost magnificent.) But in that case I should have to write to Toni as well, and much as I like Toni, my hand is absurdly clumsy. As for Else, I did finally manage to get the better of myself.

I was sorry that you stayed awake so long for my sake, don’t do it again. On the other hand, I was pleased to hear that if you really try you can leave the office at 5:30. How would it be if you took swimming lessons with F.?

Yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

[June 16 or 17, 1914]

Dear Fräulein Grete, just a few lines written in a lovely park, to the splash of a fountain and the peaceful sound of children. I am developing a taste for the amusements of very old married couples, for the view across lawns, for sitting quietly in the evening sun, for watching sparrows—I wonder why? My head which has had practically no sleep for 4 nights—it had been much better—is beginning to calm down a little. And how do I live? You are sitting

in your office rapping your pupils' knuckles, while I—today was an exceptionally easy day—tried in vain to get an hour's sleep, then went to the swimming baths, swam, did my exercises, and then, after a walk, drank some sour milk in a milk bar, and am now sitting in the park writing to you. Could a nursemaid look after me with greater care than I do? And tonight? Tonight I shall sleep as light as a feather for 2–3 hours, start up now and again, then wake up for good, perhaps half lose consciousness for brief moments, but never go to sleep again, and promptly, each time the tower clock strikes, be reminded that time passes, that after the dreadful night the dreadful day will dawn, etc. What idiotic complaints! And yet I know perfectly well that it has to pass and that I shan't perish in the process.

This evening, by the way, I shan't get to bed until very late. Dr. Weiss, according to a letter I had yesterday, is arriving from Berlin at 11. I find this a little upsetting. He intended to come to Prague, but not until early July, and now he is arriving so unexpectedly. What am I to do if he is coming here on account of my news. It wouldn't be impossible, but horrid for me.

So this again was caused by the complainer in me, just as—my conscience was pricking me all day yesterday, and began to prick me again today on account of your letter—he caused you alarm yesterday. How does God put up with these complaints? Why doesn't He strike me down? But in fact—and this again is the complainer talking—He does strike me down.

Yes, I shall be writing to Erna now, quite definitely; I should also like to give both Erna and Toni a present. It's my weakness again which cannot approach people directly, however much it may want to, and so has to be content to circumvent them with presents. I want to give Erna a book; F. meant to buy something in my name and give it to Toni but has obviously forgotten, and by now is probably forgetting it deliberately while reading the letters in which I remind her of it. Can you suggest something? You, after all, are my advisor on both major and minor issues.

But it's getting late, I am bringing today's air-, light-, and water-treatment to an end, putting my pencil in my pocket, and am about

to stroll home.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

Didn't you intend to send me more of your brother's work?—What do you mean when you complain about the irksomeness of the early part of the week?—Needless to say, no one else is reading the letters, and from now on no one else will.

*To Grete Bloch*

June 18, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, again merely a few words.

Dr. Weiss is taking up my time and I am busy. But I like him very much. (My misgivings about his coming for my sake were greatly exaggerated.) He brings with him the Berlin that I need: he is enveloped by it. Pulls me, if no more than an inch, out of this miserable hole of an office. His fears for me are greater than my own, or rather they are different, or better still partly different; he (because in many ways I am conventional, childish, sober) relieves me of some of my worries, returns to me, refreshed, some of my downtrodden hopes; in short, I feel better than I have for weeks (he is leaving tomorrow), sleep miserably, nevertheless better than before.

Kind regards, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

June 20 [presumably 24], 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, I have had 2 better nights' sleep (after Dr. Weiss's departure I had some ghastly nights again), am now alone and can examine my situation more calmly. It is so peculiar that with my head as clear as it is today, I can't talk about it at all.

A few days ago I spoke to one of the heads of a large firm of underwear manufacturers, Joss and Löwenstein; his name is Eugen

Löwenstein. The discussion turned on questions of organization; he is just getting an American to reorganize the entire commercial and technical side of his business. Naturally, the first thing I thought of was your machines. They have them at the factory, but they want to get rid of them, the people don't like working them, they are not a success. Of course I replied that the machines, which from my "experience" are excellent, were clearly not being operated properly, and that the operators would have to be instructed by some efficient person, for example by a young lady of my acquaintance from Berlin. Yes, he said, that might be possible; after discussing it with his office manager, he would be very pleased to get the young lady to come here at his expense, however long the instruction might take. No doubt Lesti[47] would be annoyed, he said, for he keeps writing to the firm which keeps turning him down, but that didn't matter.—This Herr Löwenstein has now left, will be away until the beginning of August, when I am to approach him and then it can be arranged. Do you want to? Would it be possible? I should be pleased. Though I don't know if you are still entitled to intervene in the Bohemian side of the business; however, if this firm insists on having you and no one else, then surely for the sake of good business some means could be found to enable you to come.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

*To Felice Bauer's mother*

June 24, 1914

Dear Mother,

Your postcard was delayed. Anything addressed to the apartment instead of the office goes to the shop where it gets mislaid and only turns up again by chance, especially if my mother isn't there. Meanwhile I hear rumors of a postcard for me whose exact contents are uncertain, although it has been read. Dear Mother, this is precisely what happened to your postcard. Many thanks for your courtesy; although my letter to Felice did as usual contain something important, it's not urgent; it can wait.

I was saddened by your remark about the letter you expected and did not get. Of course you are in the right, that goes without saying. You all received, entertained, and treated my parents, my sister, and me with unimaginable kindness. I had every reason to be sincerely grateful to you, to say so, and to put it in writing. I did not do so. Why? Alas, dear Mother, this is one of my failings of which you will never approve. In this case too it was not merely a question of writing, I am fully aware of it, even though writing would have been far less a matter of form than a matter of the heart. Nevertheless, believe me, I am no worse than someone who had written.

And now I kiss your hand affectionately and beg you to give my regards to your family both in Berlin and elsewhere.

Yours, Franz

*To Grete Bloch*

June 26, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, you wonder why I don't write to say how I am getting on.‡ Because it's hard to say. I sleep badly, for instance, though far better than at the time of my previous complaints. I thought I had discovered the reasons for not sleeping and hurled myself at them. But now I am troubled by other things again. And I am beginning to fear that it's all a delusion behind which there lies in wait the real core of the real misfortune, of which I know nothing directly, only by intolerable threats. How about the main reasons for your silence?

What is that pain in your leg? Didn't you have something of the kind before?

I wrote to Erna, but too late, as I see from your letter. Tomorrow I shall probably go to Hellerau,[48] at least I have announced my arrival. I don't know if I shall be able to get away next week, we shall have to discuss it further. Will the president's visit enhance your prestige?

No, I can't write any more. Many things keep jostling for attention, so much so that they keep each other down.

The Bible happens to be lying beside me, and simply to derive some comfort and pass it on to you, I opened it three times and eventually found this sentence: "In His hand are the deep places of the earth; the strength of the hills is His also." To me, alas, it sounds almost meaningless.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

I was about to seal this letter when I happened to glance up and see in a compartment of the desk a postcard with the Charlottenburg postmark. Because I keep my papers in perfect order, I am puzzled; then I see that it is the Schlossbrücke postcard which someone has secreted on my desk, and which I am now holding in my hand for the first time. Such is the state of my desk.

*To Grete Bloch*

June 30, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, no telephone call; instead a face-to-face. You mustn't talk like that, I haven't changed, am merely being tossed to and fro, which inevitably tugs at my hand which holds your dear hand. Be patient with me. After all, women are patient, but there, perhaps I wear out the best of women. You will get a full-length letter the day after tomorrow, it's too late today. I wrote to F. about the trip to Dresden, I shall be in Berlin in a fortnight's time, so whether I shall be in Dresden next Sunday I don't know—when writing to F. I was convinced of it, but when writing to you I'm not.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

*To Grete Bloch*

July 1, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, late again, so this won't be a full-length letter. I spend a lot of time in the fresh air and in the water but I don't feel well, all my joints are so tired that they ache; when I am at home I do nothing but lie on the sofa, admiring your efficiency and finding it incomprehensible; a piece of work I began is lying there, but I can scarcely lift my hand to resume it. Complaining strikes me as the most useless thing in the world, yet that is all, really all, I have the energy for. But, as you have noticed, not quite enough even for that.

You made a remark recently about jointly written postcards. I thought about it. You are wrong, and right. I am delighted with everything I get from Berlin, but unknown to myself I suppose there must also be a desire to have each one separately rather than together; I love the individual, not so the community; I am unsociable to the point of madness, not for myself alone but for all those I love. A disease, perhaps a curable one.

F. will have told you that I shall go to Berlin a week from Sunday, or rather be going on my vacation via Berlin. So I don't know whether I shall be in Dresden next Sunday; besides, I am under a slight but easily avoidable obligation to go and see my sister in the country before going on my vacation. It's more than likely, however, that I shall stay in Prague; I am hardly fit to show myself. Will you be in Berlin a week from Sunday?

I must stop now, will write again tomorrow.

Kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

The pain in your leg? What kind of pain? How did the president honor you?

*To Grete Bloch*

July 2, 1914

Dear Fräulein Grete, the frequency of my letters must compensate for their emptiness, even if this may be creating two evils instead of removing one defect. I feel the need to write to you, but am too

weary to say anything except to send you my kindest regards and to tell you that I must see you, if not this Sunday in Dresden—I shall probably spend the whole of Sunday stretched on the boards at the swimming baths, following with closed eyes the ups and downs of weariness in my joints and muscles (a noble occupation)—then at least a week from Sunday in Berlin.

Yours, Franz K.

*Copy or draft of a letter from Grete Bloch to Franz Kafka*[49]

July 3, 1914

Are the fears expressed in my letter of the day before yesterday, which you probably won't get until today because in an attempt to gain further time for reflection, which proved futile, I didn't mail it until yesterday, are these fears not well founded? And justified by your actions? Could anything appall me more than your letter of yesterday, and the *non*arrival of a letter today, a bad sign in view of your usual punctuality? Words, doctor, all but fail me. If you are not deluding yourself—can I still hope for this now, after all these proofs to the contrary?—then things look bad. I suddenly see the situation so clearly, and am in despair. The fact that I was determined, at all costs, to see your engagement as a stroke of good fortune for both of you, and considered it your destiny, undoubtedly creates an infinite responsibility to which I no longer feel equal.

I should almost like to ask you *not* to come here if you don't feel clear in your mind, firm within yourself, and *full* of enthusiasm. I had only a brief word with F. After all these letters, I hardly dare look her in the eye.—The thing you can hold against me is my ridiculous, irresponsible weakness when answering your previous letters.

G.

*To Grete Bloch*

July 3, 1914

My dear Fräulein Grete, that is certainly a very unambiguous letter. It looks as though I have convinced you at last. Sooner than F., for we have known each other only since November, whereas it took almost a year to convince F. for the first time; to this, however, I must add that at the beginning of that year my state of mind was exceptional, which makes the length of time it took to convince F. more comprehensible.[50]

The sole object of our relationship, Fräulein Grete (although on a basis of friendship which I hope cannot be shaken by any possible revelation), was to convince you. You needn't have quoted from letters, or rather the fact that you did quote is not enough. So far as I am concerned, our relationship passed through not two but three different phases. By which I mean the two days in Prague not mentioned by you. I tried to tell you then the things that were subsequently in the letters, and at that time I was neither engaged, nor was I striving to get engaged; there was, however, some inner uneasiness. I was doubly uneasy because of the impossibility of finding an answer to two questions: firstly, how will F. fare if she hears no more from me (at that time, by the way, simultaneous with your arrival came a letter from F.); and secondly, how will I fare. The prospects revealed by these two questions seemed unbearable. I couldn't get up on my toes at that time and start searching over and above everything for the prospects that might unfold if she did hear from me—that I couldn't do.

So now I have convinced you, Fräulein Grete, and you are beginning to look upon me not as F.'s fiancé, but as a threat to F. That much is clear; your letter becomes ambiguous only toward the end when you demand for F. a man who is her equal in various respects. Either, Fräulein Grete, one is "cheerful, high-spirited, intelligent, and thoroughly good," or one isn't, and instead is melancholy, ponderous, self-absorbed, and possibly striving toward the good, but with feeble forces. These conditions cannot be improved deliberately; the human fabric is not like water that can be poured from one glass into another. Ultimately, however, one isn't just melancholy and ponderous, but one is also obviously not in perfect health either, or at least one is neurasthenic to one's very

depth. No doubt all this is quite clear, almost triumphantly clear at this particular time when despite every possible care, and the fact that I do little work in the office, I am dying of exhaustion. Assuming I were cheerful, how could cheerfulness survive a situation such as this?

You ask, or you merely raise the question of my behavior in relation to F. I would have assumed that F. knew about your letter had you not specifically excluded the possibility.

Incidentally, today is my birthday, so quite fortuitously your letter acquires a special solemnity. (Apart from your letter and two others of little importance, I also received an extremely unpleasant letter today. Not that it matters; strangely enough, difficulties fortify me.) I am absolutely sure of your kindness and sincerity, and in this assurance I kiss your hand.

Yours, Franz K.

*Franz Kafka's mother to Felice Bauer's mother*
[MONOGRAM AT HEAD OF PAGE: H.K.]

Prague, July 4, 1914

My dear Anna,

Your nice, kind letter has put me to shame and I beg you not to be angry about my long silence. I have been so busy lately that I actually have not had the time to sit down and write. I am in much the same position as you. You have your troubles with the housekeeping, I have mine with the shop. But the main thing is that we are all well, and we are glad to hear that Aunt Emilie is looking for a place for the summer, for in this heat such as we are having in Prague, and which is probably no less in Berlin, the country is the only place to recuperate after an indisposition. Have you considered Franzensbad?[51] In any case, she ought to consult a doctor.

We had a very good rest at Franzensbad. Twelve days ago we had a very pleasant visit from my brother Alfred from Madrid. Unfortunately he stayed for only 4 days, but the hours he spent with us were lovely. He was sorry not to be able to pay you a visit, for he

would like to have seen and embraced our dear Felice. However, he promised, God willing, to come again next year, for he will have to attend the congress in Berlin, so he will have the opportunity of combining business with pleasure and will come and see you. We had a very charming letter from Karl, your kind husband, and as soon as I can I will try to answer his friendly words, and would ask you to forward the letter to him.

I take a keen interest in the apartment but unfortunately cannot arrange anything until it has been vacated, probably not before August 14th, but then I will see to it that it is done up nicely. I am not sure if I remember whether a divan-bed is included in either the bedroom or living-room furniture; one must be practical and consider the possibility of their having a visitor, and where he is going to rest his head. For this purpose I would provide on Franz's behalf the bedclothes—pillow, featherbed, and blanket—and would ask you for the measurements of the bedcovers, so that they would also fit the beds Felice is being given. Of course it will have to be a patent divan-bed in which the bedclothes can be stored during the day. Please let me know about this.

I have just looked at my watch to see that the time is 11 P.M. My dear Hermann has gone to Radesovitz to see the children, and I am sitting here writing, and thinking of you. During the day I find it impossible to write a private letter. Left in peace in a room by oneself, it gets done in no time. Ottla has gone to bed and Franz is working in his room. I surprised him just now and saw him blissfully contemplating dear Felice's photograph. It really has come out well. The very image of her. Well, I am coming to the end of the page, I can barely keep my eyes open, and so I must close with kindest regards from me, my husband, and the children, who are all fit and well. I embrace you in cordial friendship,

Julie Kafka

*To Felice Bauer's parents*[52]
[LETTERHEAD: Hotel Askanische Hof, Berlin]

Berlin, July 13, 1914

Now I no longer know how I shall or may address you.

I shall not come to see you, it would be unnecessary torture for us all. I know what you would say to me. You know how I would take it. So I am not coming.

I shall probably go to Lübeck this afternoon. As a comparatively slight consolation, but nevertheless as a consolation, I am taking with me the thought that we can and will remain on friendly terms even though the union we all desired has now been recognized by everyone to be impossible. No doubt Felice has convinced you as she has convinced me. I see things more and more clearly.

Farewell, you have won my unconditional admiration, especially since your handling of the situation yesterday; don't think badly of me.

With gratitude, Franz K.

*Franz Kafka's mother to Felice Bauer's mother*

[MONOGRAM AT HEAD OF PAGE: H.K.]

Prague, July 20, 1914

My dear Anna,

I cannot call you anything else, for I am well disposed toward you. Even if our children have parted, our friendship must not falter or suffer as a result. I cannot understand what has happened between them, it is incomprehensible to me. On Tuesday there was a letter from Berlin from Franz. We were very busy. Dear Hermann handed me the letter unopened; I dropped everything and went to the office in order not to be disturbed while reading. Anyone seeing me reading would undoubtedly have been horrified by my appearance, for I had frozen into a pillar of salt; I could have imagined anything rather than this. I felt battered for the rest of the day and was so relieved that my husband didn't ask what Franz had said. He was so busy he had forgotten there had been a letter from Franz. Not until the next day, after he had had a good sleep, did I ask him if he wasn't curious to know what his son had said, and then I read him the letter. You can imagine how he felt. You would

be doing me a great favor if you sent me the letter that was so disastrous, for I cannot imagine what was in it that can have been so terrible.[53] I know that Franz, in his way, is very devoted to Felice. But he has never had the gift of demonstrating his affection like other people. I am firmly convinced that he loves me most tenderly, and yet he has never shown either me, his father, or his sisters any particular affection. Nevertheless he is the kindest person imaginable. His money he shares with his poorer colleagues, since for himself he doesn't need much.[54] Perhaps he is not made for marriage, since his only endeavor is his writing, which is the most important thing in his life. For all that, I was counting on Felice's intelligence, for I said to myself that a clever woman is able to change a man. Now all my hopes are dashed. But perhaps even now we need not throw in the sponge. The children ought not to sever their friendship altogether; they should put each other to the test for a year; after all, there is no hurry for them to get married; they are still young and can wait. This is my opinion, and now I ask for yours.

Today there arrived from my brother Alfred in Madrid a letter which upset me all over again. He enclosed a check for the sum of 1000 kronen as a wedding present for Franz and Felice. I wrote him a letter this evening in which I inquired how best to return the money to him. I am writing this letter at 10 P.M., for during the day I haven't a minute. Felice should keep the bracelet I gave her in memory of a motherly friend. I must close now, for I am coming to the end of the page. I send my affectionate regards to you as well as to all your dear ones and remain in friendship,

yours, Julie Kafka

Kindest regards from my dear husband and children.

*Franz Kafka's mother to Felice Bauer's mother*
[MONOGRAM AT HEAD OF PAGE: H.K.]

Prague, August 7, 1914

My dear Anna,

I should have answered your kind letter long ago, but I am sure you will forgive me, for there is so much to worry about in these hard times and my head is so numb that I am incapable of a single clear thought. Both our sons-in-law have joined up; our daughter Elly with her two children is living with us in Franz's room, and Franz is lodging in Peppo's[55] apartment on Bilek Gasse, since Vally and the child are still with her parents-in-law in Böhmisch-Brod.[56] Isn't your son-in-law a soldier? Are none of your *mischpoche* [kith and kin] in the army? Things are very gloomy here in Prague. True, the shop is kept open, but there isn't a customer to be seen all day. We don't really mind about this, provided our dear children return safely before long. Needless to say, all this has pushed Franz's affairs into the background. It is costing us money too, since we have to pay 6 months' rent for the apartment. What are all your children doing? Are they still away on vacation or, which is more likely, back in Berlin by now? This year the resorts made no profits, for in the general panic everyone returned from the country, from health resorts and seaside places. How is dear Aunt Emilie? She is probably still with you. I assume your dear Karl is also at home now, since all business lies idle these days. I hardly read the papers now, for the more one reads the more nervous one becomes. We kept getting news from our sons-in-law until the third of this [month], but since then they haven't communicated at all; they have probably left the place in which they originally joined up, and the mail service is not functioning everywhere. As a result our daughters are even more upset. There is no end to the worries of war. We have to entrust everything to the Almighty. Owing to the war, your promised visit to us may have to be postponed; but it must not be abandoned; you must keep your promise and come and see us. You will be welcomed by all of us with open arms.

And now farewell, my most affectionate regards to all your dear ones, and let me embrace you in warm friendship,

yours, Julie Kafka

Kindest regards from my dear husband and all the children.

*To Grete Bloch*[57]

October 15, 1914

It is a strange coincidence, Fräulein Grete, that your letter should have arrived today. I don't want to say with what it coincides; that concerns me alone and the thoughts that accompanied me to bed at around 3 o'clock this morning.

Your letter was a great surprise to me. It didn't surprise me that you wrote. Why shouldn't you write to me? You do say that I hate you; but this isn't true. If everyone were to hate you, I wouldn't hate you, and not merely because I haven't the right to. It's true that at the Askanische Hof you sat in judgment over me—it was horrible for you, for me, for everyone—but it only appeared to be so; in fact I was sitting in your place, which to this day I have not left.

You are completely mistaken about F. I am not saying this to elicit details from you. I can't think of any details—my imagination has scoured this ground so often that I can trust it—I say I can't think of any details that could convince me that you are not mistaken. What you imply is absolutely impossible; it makes me miserable to think that for some incomprehensible reason F. may be deceiving herself. But that too is impossible.

I have always considered your interest to be genuine and unsparing of yourself. Nor was it easy for you to write this last letter. I thank you for it most sincerely.

Franz K.

[TELEGRAM, handed in at Prague, October 27, 1914]

> Felice Bauer, Berlin, Lindström, Gr. Frankfurter Str. 137
> letter follows slowly feeling better kind regards

[MONOGRAM AT HEAD OF PAGE: H.K.]

[Late October–early November 1914]

As far as I am concerned, Felice, nothing whatever has changed between us in the past 3 months, either for the better, or for the worse. Needless to say, I am ready at your first call, and would have replied without fail and by return to your earlier letter if I had received it. Actually, it had not occurred to me to write to you; the futility of letters and the written word in general had become too apparent at the Askanische Hof; but since my head (even with its aches, above all today) has remained the same, it has not failed to think and dream of you, and the life we lead together in my mind has only occasionally been bitter, most of the time peaceful and happy. As a matter of fact, on one occasion I did mean not actually to write but to send you a message through someone (you will never guess who, it was an exceptional opportunity), a message conceived while falling asleep about 4 in the morning, the habitual hour for my first sleep.

But the main reason why it has not occurred to me to write was that the most important aspect of our relationship really seemed to me to be quite clear. For ages you were mistaken in referring so often to what had been left unsaid. What was lacking was not discussion, but belief. Because you were unable to believe the things you heard and saw, you thought there were things that had been left unsaid. You were unable to appreciate the immense power my work has over me; you did appreciate it, but by no means fully. As a result you were bound to misinterpret everything that my worries over my work, and only my worries over my work, produced in me in the way of peculiarities which disconcerted you. Moreover, these peculiarities (odious peculiarities, I admit, odious above all to myself) manifested themselves more with you than with anyone else. That was inevitable, and had nothing to do with spite. You see, you were not only the greatest friend, but at the same time the greatest enemy, of my work, at least from the point of view of my work. Thus, though fundamentally it loved you beyond measure, equally it had to resist you with all its might for the sake of self-preservation. It had to do so in every single detail. I thought of it,

for instance, when having a meal one evening with your sister consisting almost exclusively of meat. Had you been there, I would probably have ordered almonds.

Nor was my silence at the Askanische Hof due to spite. What you said was so clear I have no wish to repeat it; but it included certain things that ought to be almost impossible for one person to say to another. True, you didn't say them until after I had been silent for some time, or had stammered some inconsequential words. And even then you waited a long time for me to say something. I no longer object to your having brought along Frl. Bl[och]; after all, I had almost discredited you in that letter to her; she had a right to be present. But that you should have allowed your sister [Erna], whom I hardly knew at the time, to come along as well—that I could not understand. However, I was only slightly disconcerted by their presence; had I been capable of saying anything decisive, I might possibly have kept silent out of spite. That is possible, but I had nothing decisive to say. I realized that all was lost; I also realized that even then, at the last moment, I could save the situation by making some startling confession, but I had no startling confession to make. I loved you then as I do now; I knew that though innocent, you had been made to suffer for two years as even the guilty ought not to suffer; but I also realized that you could not understand my position. What ought I to have done? Precisely what I did: join you, keep silent or say something very silly, listen to the story about the funny cab-driver, and gaze at you with the feeling that it was for the last time.

When I say that you could not understand my position, I do not profess to know what you ought to have done. Had I known, I wouldn't have kept it from you. I was continually trying to explain my position to you—and, what's more, you obviously understood it, but couldn't bring yourself to accept it. In me there have always been, and still are, two selves wrestling with each other. One of them is very much as you would wish him to be, and by further development he could achieve the little he lacks in order to fulfill your wishes. None of the things you reproached me with at the Askanische Hof applied to him. The other self, however, thinks of

nothing but work, which is his sole concern; it has the effect of making even the meanest thoughts appear quite normal; the death of his dearest friend would seem to be no more than a hindrance—if only a temporary one—to his work; this meanness is compensated for by the fact that he is also capable of suffering for his work. These two selves are locked in combat, but it is no ordinary fight where two pairs of fists strike out at each other. The first self is dependent upon the second; he would never, for inherent reasons never, be able to overpower him; on the contrary, he is delighted when the second succeeds, and if the second appears to be losing, the first will kneel down at his side, oblivious of everything but him. This is how it is, Felice. And yet they are locked in combat, and yet they could both be yours; the trouble is that they cannot be changed unless both were to be destroyed.

What this actually means is that you ought to have accepted it all completely, ought to have realized that whatever was happening here was also happening for you, and that everything the work requires for itself, which looks like obstinacy and moodiness, is nothing but an expedient, necessary partly for its own sake and partly forced on me by the circumstances of my life, so utterly hostile to this work. Imagine the way I live at present. Alone in my eldest sister's apartment. She, because my brother-in-law is in the army, is staying with my parents. Unless certain things interfere, above all the factory, my timetable is as follows: Office until 2:30, followed by lunch at home, followed by 1–2 hours reading newspapers, writing letters, or doing work for the office; then up to my apartment (you know it) to sleep, or just to rest; then at 9 down to my parents for supper (a decent walk), back again by tram at 10, and then to stay awake as long as my strength, or fear of the following morning, fear of headaches at the office, permits. In the course of the last three months this is the second evening I have spent without working; the first was about a month ago, when I was too tired. I also had a fortnight's vacation[58] lately, and during this period of course my timetable was slightly altered insofar as this was possible in the rush of that brief fortnight and the fearful knowledge that the days were passing. On average I sat at my desk

until 5 in the morning, once even till 7:30, then I slept; during the last few days of the vacation I managed to sleep properly, until 1 or 2 P.M., and from then on I was really free, and took time off until the evening.

You may be able to accept the kind of life I lead during a vacation, Felice, but not the life I normally lead—at least you haven't been ready to do so as yet. Those hours of the day that I consider to be the only ones lived according to my needs, I spend sitting or lying in these three silent rooms, see no one, not even my friends, except for Max for a few minutes on the way home from the office and—am not happy, certainly not, and yet content at times at the thought that I am doing my duty, as far as the circumstances permit.

I have always admitted to this way of life; it was always the doubtful question as well as the test. While you never said "No" in reply to that question, your "Yes" never encompassed the entire question. But the gap left open by your reply was filled, as far as you were concerned, Felice, with hatred, or, if that's too strong a word, with dislike. It started while you were in Frankfurt; I am not aware of the immediate cause, there may not even have been one; at any rate, it was in your letters from Frankfurt that your dislike first appeared in the way in which you responded to my concern about you, in the way in which you showed your reserve. You yourself probably did not realize it at the time, but later on you must have been aware of it. What, after all, were those fears you kept referring to later in the Tiergarten and which forced you more often into silence than into speech? What were they but dislike of my way of life, as well as indirectly of my intentions, which you could not reconcile with yours, which gave you offense? I can see you with tears in your eyes listening to Dr. W[eiss]—that was fear. That evening (these are a few, perhaps not always appropriate examples!) before I went to see your parents and you were unable to give a definite answer—that was fear. In Prague when you complained of certain things about me—that was fear. Over and over again, fear. I say fear rather than dislike, but the two feelings merged. And the

things you finally said at the Askanische Hof, weren't they the eruption of all this? Were you still in doubt when you heard yourself speak? Didn't you even use the expression that you would be bound to lose yourself if you——? And even in today's letter, Felice, I notice passages that could still be due to that fear. You must not misunderstand me, Felice. That dislike was there, yet in the eyes of the whole wide world you had decided to defy it. It might have turned out well in the end, as in happy moments I myself hoped it would. But that's not the point. You want an explanation for my behavior last time, and this explanation lies in the fact that your fears, your dislike, were constantly before my eyes. It was my duty to protect my work, which alone gives me the right to live, and your fears proved, at least made me fear (with far more unbearable fears) that here lay the gravest danger to my work. "I was nervous, I was worn out, I thought I had reached the end of my tether," that's what you write, and that's how it was. Never before had the two selves fought so hard as they did then. And it was then that I wrote that letter to Frl. Bl[och].

But perhaps I have not quite justified the reasons for my fears; after all, your explanations at the Ask. H. [Askanische Hof] were not made until later; I must not make use of them now. One of the clearest examples, however, is the disagreement about the apartment; I was dismayed by every detail of your scheme, though I could not oppose it in any way, and no doubt everyone would have insisted that you were right. It is merely that you yourself ought not to have insisted. What you wanted was perfectly reasonable: a pleasant, pleasantly furnished, family apartment, such as is inhabited by all families of both your and my social standing. Altogether you wanted no more than these people have (they were mentioned again in today's letter, they are the ones into whose "lap things fall"), but what they have, you wanted in its entirety. On one occasion—by which time I was approaching my worst fears—I asked you to cancel the ceremonies in the synagogue; you didn't answer; in my apprehensive state I assumed you had resented my request, and at the A.H. [Askanische Hof] you did in fact mention this request. But your whole idea about the apartment, what does it

show? It shows that you agree with the others, not with me; for these others, however, a home, quite legitimately, has an entirely different meaning to the one it would have had for me. These others, when they get married, are very nearly satiated, and marriage to them is but the final, great, delicious mouthful. Not so for me, I am not satiated, I haven't started a business that's expected to expand from one year of marriage to another; I don't need a permanent home from whose bourgeois orderliness I propose to run this business—not only do I not need this kind of home, it actually frightens me. I am so hungry for my work that it makes me feel limp; here, however, the conditions are antagonistic to my work, so if I set up house according to your wishes under these conditions, it would mean—if not in fact, at any rate symbolically—that I am attempting to make these conditions permanent, which is the worst thing that can befall me.

Somehow I should like to narrow down what I have just said, and so define it more clearly. You would be quite justified in asking what kind of proposals I expected of you as regards our home. Actually I can't answer that question. The most apposite and most obvious from the point of view of my work would have been to throw everything away, and to look for an apartment even higher up than the 4th floor, not in Prague, elsewhere; but it appears that neither you nor I are equipped to live in self-appointed misery. Perhaps I am even less equipped to do so than you. Well, so far neither of us has tried it. So could I really expect the suggestion to come from you? Not exactly; though had you suggested it I should have been so happy I wouldn't have known what to do, but I certainly didn't expect it. But certainly a compromise could or rather would have been found. And you would have found it, without so much as looking, quite naturally, if only—yes, if only it had not been for those fears, that dislike, which prevented you from doing the things that were essential to me and to our life together. Indeed, I could have gone on hoping that agreement might yet be reached, but these would have been merely hopes; but at that moment there were signs of the precise opposite which were bound

to frighten me, and from which I had to protect myself as long as I wanted you to have a husband who was alive.

Now of course you can turn the whole thing around and say that you, your very nature was as dangerously threatened as mine, and that your fears were as fully justified as mine. I don't believe that this was the case. For I loved you in your true nature, and feared it only when it met my work with hostility. And since I loved you so much I was bound to help you to protect yourself. But even this is not strictly true; you certainly were endangered, but then didn't you want to be endangered at all? Never? Not at all?

What I have said is not new, I may have summarized it in a slightly different way, but it's nothing new. What is new is that it doesn't form part of a regular correspondence, and this, as well as the fact that you asked for this summing-up, gives me hope of receiving a clear-cut answer. I am eager for your reply. You must answer, Felice, no matter how much you may object to my letter. I am extremely impatient for your answer. When I stopped writing this letter yesterday—it was getting late—and went to bed, I slept for a while, but when, later on, I woke up and couldn't get to sleep again until morning, all our sorrows and woes—this really is something we have in common—came over me undiminished, as in the worst days. After all, everything still hangs together, not one of these worries has been resolved, as soon as one allows it all to come a little closer. It tears at one this way and that, as though gripping one by the tongue. There were moments during last night when I thought I had crossed the borderline of madness, and I didn't know how to save myself. So you will answer my letter, and if you want to be especially kind, please notify me by telegram as soon as you receive this.

You mention my correspondence with Erna. I don't know what you mean when you say I should write to you irrespective of this correspondence. It so happens that I shall be writing to Erna tomorrow. So I'll tell her that I have written to you. Erna has been unimaginably kind to me, and to you, too.[59]

Franz

[TELEGRAM, handed in at Prague, November 3, 1914]

Felice Bauer, Berlin, Gr. Frankfurter Str. 137
letter on way kind regards elsa brod

*Franz Kafka's mother to the Bauer family on the death of Felice's father*[60]

[MONOGRAM AT HEAD OF PAGE: H.K.]

Prague, November 27, 1914

My dear ones,

We have conveyed our condolences to you by telegram, but from the bottom of my heart I feel like writing to express once more our sincerest sympathy on the grievous loss you have suffered. Words are inadequate to describe our grief on receipt of your sad news. I know any efforts to console you would be in vain; time alone can ease your pain. You, my dear good Anna, will have to try and carry on for your children's sake, for after all, when you think it over, dying is not the worst that can happen, especially if death comes peacefully, as it did to your dear husband; this must be a consolation to you all in these sad days.

Very likely the war is largely responsible even for this loss, for the daily tensions are bound to leave their mark.

We too have fearful worries. Our son-in-law Peppo came home three weeks ago with a wounded hand. We still do not know how long it will take to heal. Karl sends us news from time to time. My entire family feels deeply for you in your great sorrow, above all my husband who loved the departed like a true friend. We too suffered a painful loss 6 weeks ago. My husband's eldest brother, Filip Kafka from Kolin, died after a short illness. He was in his 68th year and his only surviving brother. Two younger ones preceded him to the grave.

Thus one after another passes on.

Will you please convey our sympathy to dear Aunt Emilie; for her too it is a great loss from which she will find it hard to recover.

And now farewell, and let me assure you of our constant friendship,

especially from your Julie Kafka

January 25, 1915[1]

Shall I sum up, F.? To begin with an observation, as true as ever. I put pen to paper and am close to you at once, closer than if I were standing by the sofa. Here you do not upset me, here you do not avoid my eyes, my thoughts, my questions; you do not avoid them even when you are silent. Could it be that here we are in the apartment in the attic, with the church clock as our grandfather clock? It's possible.

We have established the fact that our time together was not pleasant. And that's putting it mildly. We may not have spent a single minute together entirely free of strain. I remember Christmas 1912. Max was in Berlin and thought he had better prepare you for a horrible letter. You promised to be brave, but said something like this: "It is very strange, we write to each other quite regularly and very often, I have had a great many letters from him, I would like to help him, but it is very difficult, he makes it so difficult for me, we never seem to get any closer." That is still—try to understand—the way things are, for both of us. The one realizes it sooner, the other later; the one forgets it the moment the other remembers. But one would think it could easily be remedied. When one cannot get closer, one simply goes further away. But that again is impossible. The signpost points in one direction only.

This is the first merciless fact. The second lies within ourselves. I have noticed that each of us is merciless toward the other; this is not because one does not mean enough to the other, nevertheless we are without mercy—you probably in all innocence, hence without any feeling of guilt, thus without the agony of that feeling. Not so with me. Indeed, it may be a misfortune that I am unable to quarrel; it is as though I actually expected a miracle to make me as convincing as I long to be, with the result that I don't make the effort to convince

in a straightforward fashion, or rather, I do make the effort, but my incapacity is such that it goes entirely unnoticed. This is why we have no apparent quarrels; we walk along peacefully side by side, but all the time tremors keep running between us as though someone were continually cutting the air between us with a sword. Let me not forget: you don't quarrel, either; you too suffer in silence, and on balance your suffering, because of its very innocence, may be much harder to bear than mine.

And then of course what I had foreseen so clearly actually happened. I did not come willingly, I knew what I was up against. I was up against the lure of proximity, that unreasonable lure which gets me by the throat and refuses to leave me alone even in this icebox of a room. In the morning you stood by the bench with the two bags on it, and in the afternoon at the foot of the steps leading up to the coffeehouse. It is almost unbearable to think about it, despite the many and arduous mental exercises practiced over the years. I don't know how I can do it, and yet cope with my work, but I shall have to.

I won't write a lot, letters are so slow, one is not writing as freely as usual either, nor shall I press you with renewed requests for letters; we have not achieved much by way of letters, we must try to achieve it in some other way. It may be possible, after all—however impossible it seems at present—to arrange to have the afternoons for my work; at any rate I am going to try. And in a certain sense this work is meant for you, though some demon forced you to suggest I should try to make something of the factory. Why do you have more understanding for the factory than for me!

Enough; I still have a great deal to do. The caretaker is ill, so now I shall have to make the bed I flung open this morning. I should also sweep and dust, but since the caretaker almost invariably fails to do it, there is no urgent need for it to be done today. If in the morning —I don't expect the caretaker to wake me—you felt like waking me up punctually at 7:30 by means of a pleasant, friendly dream, that would be very sweet of you. But try to arrange it in such a way that the dream, before waking me, continues right through to the truly happy ending which, let us hope, may still await us somewhere.

Kind regards, Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] I have sent you the book by Werfel.

February 11, 1915

I shall grumble, F., grumble until I feel better. You won't laugh, will you? My work was going relatively well until a few days before Bodenbach; at that point my brother-in-law's brother had to join up, and then the factory, that lamentable specimen of a factory, devolved upon me. I could write pages on the anguish it has been causing me for ages, almost from the beginning (pointless, for the factory really doesn't profit from it). But now I really had to tackle it and go there every day; there was no longer any question of my being able to work, despite the utmost exertion of will power. The factory was practically at a standstill; nevertheless, there was the warehouse; creditors and clients had to be reassured, etc., so my work—which I had managed to get a good grip on just lately—had to be dropped. But quite soon things improved, at least temporarily; my brother-in-law's brother was stationed in Prague for the moment, so he could spend an hour or two at the factory, which I took as an immediate sign for me to withdraw. Once more I sat in the silent apartment trying to pick up the threads. It is very difficult for me to find my way back after an interval; it's as though the door, which only a great effort had forced open, had unobtrusively swung shut—which does indeed cast doubts upon my capabilities. Yet finally I did succeed in finding my way back into it, and I felt I'd been transformed. Why, for once, instead of my work, can't I find you there? My good fortune lasted no more than two days, after which I had to move. We both know what it means to go apartment-hunting. And once again, the rooms I've seen! One is forced to believe that, either inadvertently or deliberately, people bury themselves in dirt. At any rate, that seems to be the case here; they imagine dirt—by which I mean overcrowded sideboards, rugs in front of windows, a forest of photographs on much-abused desks, linen piled high on beds, aspidistras in corners—they imagine all

this to be luxury. But I don't really mind about any of that. All I want is peace, but the kind of peace that is beyond people's understanding. Obviously—since no one in any ordinary household needs the kind of peace necessary to me; neither reading, nor studying, nor sleeping, in fact nothing needs the kind of peace I need for writing. I have been in my new room[2] since yesterday, and last night I was in such a state of despair that I imagined the urgency with which I longed to get out of this room, and out of the world, were equal. And yet nothing unusual had happened; they are all very considerate, my landlady fades quietly into the shadows for my sake; the young man who sleeps next door comes home tired from the office, takes a few steps, and is in bed. And yet the apartment is undoubtedly small; one can hear doors opening and shutting; although my landlady is silent all day, she can't help exchanging a few whispered words with the other lodger before going to bed; she can hardly be heard, though the lodger can—just. The walls are really terribly thin; to my landlady's sorrow I stopped the striking-clock in my room, it was the first thing I did on entering, but then the striking-clock next door strikes all the louder; I try not to hear the minutes, but the half-hours are proclaimed with a deafening if melodious sound; but I cannot play the tyrant and demand that this clock be stopped as well. It would be no good anyway, there is always bound to be a certain amount of whispering, the doorbell is bound to ring; the lodger coughed twice yesterday, by today it was more often, his cough hurts me more than it does him.[3] I can't be annoyed with any of them; this morning my landlady apologized for the whispering, it was most unusual and had occurred only because the lodger (for my sake) was moving to another room and she was about to install him in the new one; moreover, she would hang a heavy curtain outside the door. Extremely kind, yet in all probability I shall give notice on Monday. I must admit I am very spoiled by that quiet apartment, but it is the only way I can live. Don't laugh, F., don't look upon my suffering as despicable; no doubt many people are suffering nowadays, and the cause of their suffering is something more than whispers in the next room; at best, however, they are fighting for their existence, or

rather for the bonds connecting their existence to that of the community, and so do I, and so does everyone. Accompany me with your good wishes when I look for another room.

I will answer your letter presently. When are you going away again? The other day in an article there was a paragraph about the conversion of a gramophone factory into a canning factory; it must have been a description of your factory; I read it with great pleasure; after all, I have more affectionate ties with that factory than with mine. Warm and good wishes,

Franz

How did you like the Werfel?

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] March 3, [1915]

Today, F., your letter arrived, so one letter has been lost, yours or mine, it's maddening. From now on I will send you a registered letter regularly once every two weeks. Indeed, there is a lot to say, but to say it in open letters is almost impossible. Moreover, I have almost taken a dislike to letters; what good does it do if writing succeeds and everything else is such a failure? Possibilities for the future are tucked away in your letter, which is sweet and kind. You didn't misunderstand me in B[odenbach], but as a prize for me it presupposes a fine and proper decision which has to be carried out and not written.

Franz

[ON THE VERSO] Letter being sent today.

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It is very difficult to dispatch the manuscript[4] at present—before being typed or printed.

March 3, 1914 [1915]

Telegram and postcard have been sent. Weeks of not feeling like work, of headaches, of thoughts perpetually going around in tight circles, are behind me. Again today my head is aching like mad (I don't get enough sleep), but otherwise things have improved, and are going to get better still. It is not that I actually lack tenacity, it is just that it usually works against me.

I have already left my room [Bilekgasse]; it took a great deal of determination. The old woman used to come to my bed nearly every morning and whisper new suggestions for improvements with which to increase the quiet of the apartment. With my notice to quit firmly resolved, I still had to express my gratitude. Finally, on the last day but one, when I opened my mouth to give notice, she was just taking her daughter's theater coat out of the cupboard (there are certain yellowish theater coats with lace collars that throw me into a state of melancholy, and it was one of those coats); since she intended to take her daughter to a small party that evening, I didn't want to spoil her pleasure, so postponed giving notice until the following day. However, it wasn't quite as bad as I had expected, though she did confess she had thought I would stay there until the day I died—without being more specific about the date. The room I have now rented may not be much better, but at least it's not the same room.[5] Perhaps it was not so much the restlessness of the apartment that drove me away, for after all I have achieved practically nothing recently so far as my work is concerned, so haven't been in a position to test either the calm or the restlessness of the apartment; it was more my own restlessness, a feeling I have no wish to interpret.

However, I do want to interpret your dream. Had you not been lying on the ground among the animals, you would have been unable to see the sky and the stars and wouldn't have been set free. Perhaps you wouldn't have survived the terror of standing upright. I feel much the same; it is a mutual dream that you have dreamed for us both.

In your letter you say jokingly that I should come to Berlin and ask seriously what is to happen to us. The two are interrelated. Tell me candidly, do you think there is a future for us together in

Prague? If not, it won't be Prague's fault. Nor will it be the fault of outward circumstances. On the contrary. Once the war has come to an end without causing too much destruction, presumably conditions will be quite favorable. Just think, I have now been given an extra 1200 kronen, a nice sum of money as such, but I cannot get any pleasure from it here; on the contrary, I almost felt like refusing it, as if it were an additional obstacle. What do you think?

A few more questions: Why do you sleep badly, and what kind of badness is it? How did you get hold of that envelope? Why do you read old and not very good books such as *Meditation*? A suggestion: Will you read, but to the end, only books that I send you? In which case you would have to start with the volumes of Flaubert's and Browning's letters. And then in the summer we will travel.

Franz

[POSTMARKED ON ARRIVAL: Berlin, March 23, 1915]

[March 21, 1915]

Still no news, F.; and it's such a long time. How are you spending this first day of spring? I went for a walk today, my first for ages, for it is Sunday and the weather is fine, one of those moments when the dispositions in the courtroom change, when the most absurd switches take place, when one imagines one has been treated very well, and all sums, despite obvious and eye-catching errors, come out right. This feeling, however, is a misplaced one, at least it comes in unnecessary abundance; on this particular morning I don't need it, though I did need it yesterday morning and the one before, when I virtually rolled my aching head in my hands because it seemed impossible to abandon it to its own devices. This morning might make up for it, but I didn't know this yesterday, and by tomorrow I shall have forgotten.

Have you moved yet? I have moved to a room about ten times noisier than the last, but incomparably more pleasant in every other respect. I thought both the location and the appearance of a room were irrelevant to me. But they are not. Without having a fairly

open view, without the chance of seeing a large expanse of sky from my window with perhaps a steeple in the distance—that is, if it can't be real open country—without these, I am a wretched, depressed creature; though I cannot give the exact proportion of misery that can be attributed to the room, it cannot be small; in this room I even get the morning sun, and since the rooftops all around are much lower, it shines full and direct upon me. But I get more than the morning sun, for it is a corner room and two windows face southwest. But to prevent me from becoming presumptuous, someone right above my head in a studio (empty, not even let!!) stamps around all day in heavy boots and has installed some kind of quite pointless noise-machine to simulate the sound of a game of nine-pins. A heavy ball is rolled at great speed along the full length of the ceiling, lands in a corner, and comes slowly bumping back. Although the lady who lets the room can hear it too, she tries—since nothing must be left untried for a lodger—to use logic to deny the existence of the noise by pointing out that the studio is untenanted and empty. To which I can only reply that this noise is not the only illogical, and therefore irremediable, vexation in the world.

By the way, I am by no means in the country; in fact, when out on my balcony I look almost straight into the windows of the apartment whose plans you and I once studied. Today that apartment too was getting the morning sun through all three windows on the street side. I had no idea what to say to those windows. What would you have said? I see these windows in the evening as well, usually all three of them are lit up, though not as late as mine. I live entirely alone, spend every evening at home, haven't attended the Saturday evenings[6] for a month, but have been incapable of doing any decent work for 2 months. But I've talked enough about myself. Now it's your turn!

Affectionately, F.

[POSTMARK: Prague, April 5, 1915]

Also on Sunday, Felice, on a lovely, peaceful, gray Sunday. The canary and I are the only ones awake in the apartment. I am at home with my parents. In my own room, I suppose, all hell has been let loose; behind the wall on the right it sounds as though they are unloading timber; one can hear a tree trunk being released from the truck, then it is raised, sighs like a living thing, then a crash! It falls and is received into the reverberations of the whole infernal concrete building. Above my room the elevator mechanism purrs and echoes right through the empty attic rooms. (This is my supposed former studio-ghost, but there are also housemaids who, when drying the wash, practically run their slippers over my scalp.) Below me there is a nursery-cum-drawingroom; during the day children run about, screaming; somewhere a door is continually screeching as it is wrenched open; the nursemaid for her part screams in an attempt to enforce peace and quiet; in the evening the grownups chatter away as though they were having a party down there every day. But by 10 o'clock it's all over, at least it has been so far; sometimes there has been peace even at 9 and then, provided they are still capable of it, my nerves can enjoy a most wonderful calm.

For relief from daytime noises I have sent to Berlin—I am constantly forced to fall back on Berlin—for some Oropax, a kind of wax wrapped in cotton wool. It may be a bit messy, and it's a nuisance to start stopping up one's ears in one's lifetime; it doesn't even shut out the noise, merely muffles it—but even so. In Strindberg's novel *By the Open Sea*, which I read a few days ago—it's magnificent, do you know it?—the hero, suffering from a complaint not unlike mine, had some so-called sleeping-balls which he had bought in Germany, little steel balls that slide into one's ears. But alas, they seem to exist only in Strindberg's imagination.

Am I suffering on account of the war? Essentially one cannot know as yet what one experiences within oneself. Superficially it makes me suffer because our factory is going on the rocks, something I suspect rather than know, since I haven't been there for a month. My brother-in-law's brother is doing his training here, and so is able to give it some attention for the time being. My eldest

sister's husband is in the Carpathians with the Army Service Corps, and presumably not in imminent danger; my other sister's husband, as you know, was wounded, then went to the front for a few days, came back with sciatica, and is now being restored to health in Teplitz.[7] In addition, I mostly suffer from the war because I myself am taking no part. But put down like that in black and white, it merely looks silly. Anyway, it's not out of the question that my turn won't come. There are certain decisive factors that prevent me from volunteering, though among them are those that always prevent me anyhow.

Including those, F., that prevent us from living in Prague no matter how good the conditions, and no matter how desirable they will seem in retrospect a few years hence. I am out of place here, and it is not that I am in conflict with my surroundings (if I were, no one's help would be more welcome or more opportune than yours); I am in conflict only with myself, and for both our sakes I must on no account drag you with me into this conflict; when in my folly I tried to do so, it brought about its own retribution almost at once. In order to feel one has, or actually has, the right to another human being, one must either have progressed further than I have, or else not even attempt the course I wish to follow. But here in Prague it seems impossible for me to escape from this predicament.

You seem to have misunderstood my remark about money. It is a monthly raise in salary of 100 kronen—the spending of which, needless to say, doesn't worry me in the least. Don't forget, I am actually liable for the factory with all I possess! My dissatisfaction was due to the fact that owing to this money the hole I find myself in has been dug a little deeper.

You tell me so little about yourself, F. What work you are doing, whether there is less work now than there used to be, what the new job implies, whom you see, why you sit at home by yourself on Sunday afternoon, what you are reading, whether you go to the theater, whether your salary hasn't been reduced, what you are wearing (in Bodenbach it was very pretty, that little jacket), how you are getting along with Erna—I am told nothing about all this,

though it surely lies well within my sphere of interest. And your brother? And your brother-in-law?

One more thing: We need have no regrets about the loss of the apartment opposite my room. An apartment with no view (my room, on the other hand, has a distant view in two directions, though indeed this is hard to understand without further explanation), inhabited by a woman and her daughter, of whom I recall nothing but a poisonously yellow blouse, hairy cheeks, and a waddling gait. That apartment is well lost.

Affectionately, Franz

[POSTMARK: April 20, 1915]

What a long time I have been without news, Felice! What are you up to? If someone doesn't reply for a long time, it's as though he were sitting opposite one in silence; one is tempted to ask: What are you thinking about?

Now's the time to think about the past year, though it is always the time to think about that. She looked marvelous as she entered in the blue dress, but the kiss was not sincere, neither sincerely bestowed, nor sincerely received. Not sincerely bestowed, since he had no right to it; the fact that he loved her did not in itself give him the right; the fact that he loved her should have denied him that kiss. For where did he intend to take her? What was his own position? Owing to the combined effort by his parents (for which he almost hated them, quite unjustly of course) and a number of others, a plank had been placed under him, upon which he stands to this day. And because this plank was strong enough to carry two—owing to this sadly ridiculous fact he assumed the right to take her with him. But in reality there was no firm ground under his feet; that he had managed to balance on his plank until now was no merit, but a disgrace. So tell me where he intended to carry her off to; it is unimaginable. He loved her and was insatiable. Today he loves her no less, though finally he may have learned his lesson: that it isn't as simple and easy as all that to win her, even if she agrees.

But what I don't understand is how an intelligent girl who sees things clearly, who has learned her lesson from endless torture—I don't understand how she can still believe that here in Prague it would be possible and right. She did come here, after all; she did see, if not everything, at least a great deal; she has had the opportunity of reading so much about it, and yet she still believes it would be possible. How does she imagine it would be? After all, she did at least sense the truth, and not just once, but several times; her childishly malicious words at the Askanische Hof were proof enough.—To change the subject:

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Could we see each other at Whitsun? It would make me very happy. Who knows whether my plans for a summer trip, which you apparently don't even want to hear of, won't be impossible anyway owing to the cancellation of all vacations? But I don't want to go to Berlin for Whitsun. To go to Germany at all creates awful difficulties. You know how long I kept begging for my passport, and in the end it didn't arrive in time. After that I didn't bother to go back. The papers I enclosed are still there, and some rat or other is now gnawing your two telegrams which belong to me. The same old game would be bound to start all over again. A letter from you, some proof of urgent family business would be required, and then again that long wait. You have a passport. If you were willing to come to Bodenbach, we could spend Whitsun in Bohemian Switzerland. Of course it would be best if you could come alone. If that's impossible, bring anyone you like. And write to me about it soon.

Affectionately, Franz

Two books are on their way to you; in fact they should have arrived long ago.

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Sátoraljaujhely, April 24, 1915][8]

Best wishes. Even if only some of the postcards reach you, they all have the same meaning. While traveling I am accompanied by the hallucination of a dangling hand which I raise and kiss.

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Hatvan, April 25, 1915]

Accompanying my sister to my brother-in-law. Best wishes and a plea for the ending of the long silence. I am unwavering about Whitsun. Would even come to Germany if you want me to, but this would require a letter from you.

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Nagymihály, April 26, 1915]
Greetings at every step.

Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Budapest, April 27, 1915]
Handed over my sister and returned, alas. Best wishes

F.

[PICTURE POSTCARD]

[Vienna, end of April 1915]

Last stop. Best wishes.

F.

[PICTURE POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Všenory-Dobřichovice, May 3, 1915]
My reply to the question: Yes, yes, yes. But you should not ask and should know whom you are asking and who is answering. And

Whitsun? Letters take so long, your letter from Freienwalde, after an immense delay, arrived shortly after my departure; your second letter arrived fairly punctually, the book came yesterday; I spent half the afternoon gratefully poring over it.[9] Today I have been out in the country since early morning, alone except for a biography of Bismarck which I have hardly bothered to open. Almost the only thing that gives me a relative sense of contentment in Prague is being alone.

Affectionately, Franz

[POSTMARKED ON ARRIVAL: Berlin, May 6, 1915]

Don't write like that, Felice. You are wrong. There are certain misunderstandings between us which I, at any rate, confidently expect to be cleared up, though not perhaps by letter. I have not changed (alas); the balance—of which I represent the vacillations—has remained the same; the only slight change has been in the distribution of weight; I believe I know more about both of us, and now have a temporary objective. We will discuss it at Whitsun, if we manage to meet. Felice, don't think that the impeding considerations and anxieties are not an almost unbearable and detestable burden to me, that I wouldn't prefer to shed everything, that I wouldn't prefer a straightforward approach, and that I wouldn't rather be happy now and at once in a small intimate circle, and above all give happiness. But this isn't possible, it is a burden I am forced to bear, I shiver with discontent, and even if my failures stared me in the face, and not only my failures but also the loss of all hope and the steady approach of all guilt—I really couldn't behave otherwise. Incidentally, Felice, why do you think—at least it seems as though you do at times—that life together here in Prague might be possible? After all, you used to have grave doubts about it. What has removed them? This is something I still don't know.

And now again those lines in the book.[10] Reading them makes me unhappy. Nothing has ended, there is no darkness, no cold. But I am

almost afraid to write it down, it seems like a confirmation of the fact that such things really could be written. What dreadful misunderstandings are piling up again.

Listen, Felice, the only thing that has happened is that my letters have become less frequent and different. What was the result of those more frequent and different letters? You know it. We must start afresh. That We, however, does not refer to you, for you were and are in the right,[11] insofar as you alone were concerned; that We refers rather to me and to our relationship. But for such a fresh start letters are no good; and if they are necessary—and they are necessary—then they must be different. But fundamentally, Felice, fundamentally.—Do you remember the letters I wrote to Frankfurt about two years ago, at just about this time of year? Believe me, deep down I am almost on the point of writing them again right now. They are lying in wait on the tip of my pen. But they will not be written.

Why don't you realize that it would be my good fortune (and our good fortune, perhaps not our sorrow, but at any rate our good fortune must be shared, in spite of *Salammbô* of which, by the way, I have always been suspicious; you couldn't possibly have written that in *Education*), that it would be my good fortune to become a soldier, provided of course my health will stand up to it, which I hope it will. I shall be called up at the end of this month, or the beginning of next. You ought to hope that I will be accepted, as is my wish.

And at Whitsun we shall meet. Pity I haven't heard from you yet. Should you have the slightest objection to coming to Bodenbach, I will try to get a passport and pay you a visit—if necessary even in Berlin.

The *Memoirs*[12] are meant neither to improve nor influence your way of thinking; that was not my intention. But this life really is worth sharing. How it longs to sacrifice itself, and does! A veritable suicide and a resurrection while still alive. And what is the sacrifice for? How many readers would be able to recognize a success that,

taken out of the context of the book, could stand on its own legs? I am glad you are reading it. I hope Muzzi doesn't bother you too much when she turns on the tap next to the table. Kind regards to you and to her.

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, May 4, 1915]

Letters are too slow, one is on its way, I am writing this postcard because I'm worried about you; accept it as a mere handshake, the rest is in the letter. Today I heard that you were in Budapest on April 24th, so we were probably there at the same time; what a happy but clumsy coincidence! I was there for only two hours in the evening on my way back, but could easily have stayed until noon the following day. How maddening! The greatest comfort I derived from my stay in Budapest was that I thought about you, that you had been there (in days only seemingly better for us), that one of your sisters is there, and so on and so forth. The combination produced a sense of proximity, but to think that you were actually there, might suddenly have stood there at my table in the coffeehouse! Maddening!

[PICTURE POSTCARD]

[Všenory-Dobřichovice,] Sunday, May 9, [1915]

At least 3 weeks without news, without an answer to my letters and numerous postcards. Am rather anxious. In apparent contradiction to this, am sitting on a lofty garden terrace looking out over a wide valley, fields, meadows, a river, and wooded hillsides. Cool, sunny day. Where are you? Wherever you may be,

my most affectionate regards

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, May 26, 1915]

Dear Felice, the other day you asked me a number of fantastic questions about F.'s fiancé. I am better able to answer them now, for I observed him carefully on the return journey in the train.[13] It was made easy, for the crowd was such that the two of us literally had to sit in one seat. Well, in my opinion he is really in bondage to F.; you should have seen how, throughout the long journey, he sought memories of F. and her room among the lilac (this is the first time he has ever traveled with anything of the kind). Old Herr W.[14] sat on his other side, reciting poems by Heine. However fond his neighbor may be of Herr W., he does not care for Heine's poetry. There is but one short line he likes, which may not even be by Heine. I believe it appears several times as a motto in Heine's works: "She was lovable and he loved her, but he was not lovable and she did not love him. (Old Play.)"[15] But I didn't mean to write about Heine, rather to give you various pieces of information you seem to want. Soon. I believe the person concerned has greater confidence in me than in F.

[IN THE MARGIN] A kiss upon the wide soft hand in its delicate glove.

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, May 27, 1915]

Dear Felice, listen, he says he is alarmed. He says he stayed there too long. Two days had been too much. After one day it is easy to get away, but two days create ties which are painful to break. Sleeping under the same roof, eating at the same table, experiencing the same daily routine twice over—this might almost be said to constitute a rite following some unwritten law. At least this is how he feels; he is alarmed; he longs for the blueberry snapshot, wants information about her toothache, and is very impatient for news. By which I don't mean to say he is unhappy at this moment; at present he looks forward to the possibility that he may yet be accepted.[16] But if he isn't accepted, which would be very bad, then he would

like, in contradiction to the above, to embark as soon as possible on that joint expedition to the Baltic.

F.

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, July 10, 1915]

Dear Felice, I suspected something serious might happen, but nothing as bad as this. There is no living trace on the film; we took the photographs with the protective cover instead of the film. I pass the films to your room, you throw them back to mine—all in vain; at the sight of your camera the Jews take to their heels; at Elbogen [near Karlsbad[17]] I glance up at you, thinking it will be forever; all in vain and in vain. You are all right, you have the camera, and yourself, but how are you going to console me?

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Rumburg, July 20, 1915][18]

Dear Felice, you will be hearing from me more often now, forgive my silence. On my return to Prague things became unbearable, I had to get away, I felt an urge to get away, and since I was also being driven away by insomnia and all that goes with it, I gave in. I wanted to go either far away, to Lake Wolfgang, for example, or—from that old, though constantly diminishing, habit of mine—to a sanatorium. Finally the bad train service (17 hours to Wolfgang) scared me off the long journey, so I am in a sanatorium. Disgraceful but consistent, fits my general life as a lid fits a saucepan. As a matter of fact I probably won't stay long. In the autumn I shall have at least one free week. My principal disease is impatience or patience, I am not quite sure which.

Affectionately, yours, Franz

[PICTURE POSTCARD]

[Rumburg, end of July 1915]

Somewhat acclimatized by now. Huge beautiful woods. A simple hilly, yet not mountainous country, so just right for my present frame of mind. On Sunday I am going home. A parcel from home arrived today; looking forward to the possibility of finding something from you inside.

Affectionately, Franz

August 9, 1915

Dear Felice, I spoke to him quite frankly, as you would have done, and he also answered me frankly.

I said: “Why don’t you write? Why are you tormenting F.? That you are tormenting her is surely quite obvious, from her postcards. You promise to write, and don’t. You send a telegram ‘letter on way,’ but there is no letter on the way; it doesn’t get written until 2 days later. Once in a while and as an exception, a girl might be permitted to behave in this way, it could even be innocent, provided it is in keeping with her character. But in your case it is not innocent, for your silence can only mean concealment, so cannot be excused.”

He replied: “But it can be excused, for there are circumstances in which there is little difference between expressing and concealing. My suffering is fourfold:

I cannot live in Prague. I don’t know if I can live elsewhere, but that I cannot live here is the most definite thing I know.

Furthermore: This is why I cannot have F. at present.

Furthermore: I cannot help (it is even in print[19]) admiring other people’s children.

Finally: At times I feel I shall be crushed by these torments on every side. But my present suffering is not the worst. The worst is that time passes, that this suffering makes me more wretched and incapable, and prospects for the future grow increasingly more dismal.

Is that not enough? She cannot imagine what I have been through since my penultimate meeting with F. For weeks on end I dread being alone in my room. For weeks on end sleep and delirium are indistinguishable. I go to a sanatorium, yet am convinced of the madness of doing so. What do I expect to gain? Is it a place where nights don't exist? It's worse: days there are the same as nights. I come back and spend the first week as though beside myself, think of nothing but my, or our, misfortune, and neither at the office nor in ordinary conversation am I able to take in more than mere superficialities, and this only between the aches and strains in my head. I am in the grip of a kind of imbecility. Wasn't I rather like this in Karlsbad? Which reminds me of that last night in Bodenbach, when I pulled the blanket over me at 4 o'clock and thought: now F. is here—she is mine—for 2 whole days—what bliss! And then came Karlsbad and—I have to say even this—the truly horrible journey to Aussig.

Well, even now I haven't said much, but something. This much I might write and tell F. Basically, briefly, her reply would be: 'You have only yourself to blame.' To provoke this reply would be pointless, so I won't write. Had anything new happened to me, I would of course have written at once, but this old stuff—though increased to immense proportions in the past few months—she knows it all, or rather, has heard of it. I really can't think of a remedy. A meeting perhaps, next Sunday in Bodenbach? It wouldn't be a remedy.

It is very odd. F.'s writing is quite unlike her talk. If she were to talk the way she writes, all would be different; I am not saying it would be better, but all would be different. She says I take everything literally. Possibly. But so does she, even more so. For instance, had I said to her face what I have just said here, F. would probably have replied: 'That's so like you. A meeting in Bodenbach, according to you, is no remedy. And you say it would not be better if I spoke the way I write.' Unperturbed by this, I maintain: 'Had I been in a state of mind last year like the one I am in now (it was different, though no less intolerable), then F. would undoubtedly be in Prague today; my second suffering would have been removed,

and possibly the third too, but the first and one-half of the fourth would have grown to such proportions that it would have buried us all.' "

These are his words, and his appearance confirms his state of mind. He is delirious, utterly uncontrolled and distracted. At the moment there seem to be but two possible remedies for him—not in the sense that they can wipe out the past, but possibly guard him against future happenings. One would be F.; the other, military service. He has been deprived of both. When all is said and done, I could not disagree with him about not writing. Does his writing not cause more sorrow than his silence?

Affectionately, Franz

I haven't received the promised letter about my visit to Berlin. But for the time being it could only apply to a Sunday, since vacations for all exempted men[20] have recently been cancelled.

[PICTURE POSTCARD]

[řičany, presumably summer 1915]

One night's vacation. Kind regards

Franz

Address: S. Fr. [Sophie Friedmann]
Waldenburg, Prussian Silesia
Fürstensteiner Str. 66

Max Brod sends best wishes.

[POSTMARK: Prague, December 5, 1915]

Dear Felice, everything is unchanged; as long as the stabbing pains in my head go no deeper, I am thankful. This is also why I am not writing, as I have explained before, but there are other good reasons. No doubt you can still remember what I was like in Karlsbad. Now, if it's possible, I am even worse. I don't want a man in this state to be thrust at you, you mustn't see me like this; in any case, I don't even know if you could come to Bodenbach, and of course I can't come to Berlin, for I haven't got a passport. But as I said, I have no wish to show my face in Bodenbach either, I don't even show it in Prague. By which I don't mean that I am entirely without hope. How could I live without hope?

But surely there is no immediate obstacle to prevent you from writing. Why don't I occasionally hear something about you? You are unhappy about me? What can I do? I do believe that even the true voice of an angel from heaven could not raise my spirits; so low have I sunk. If you were to ask why, I could offer little more than extraneous explanations; even mentioning my insomnia and headaches would be extraneous—however grave and real these are.

The parcel for your sister will be mailed tomorrow. Soon I will send you Max's new novel,[21] which I like very much.

With kindest regards, Franz

What is Erna's address? I want to send her *Metamorphosis*.

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Your charming postcards have arrived. It would be nice to meet; nevertheless we should not do so. Once again it would only be temporary, and we have suffered enough from temporary expedients. Once again, even now, I could bring you nothing but disappointments, monster of insomnia and headaches that I am. So not this time; I won't move from Prague, but will spend the holidays creeping along the old familiar walks.

How are you getting along in your job? Have you any news of your brother? And your family? My infrequent and insipid replies cannot possibly show how glad I am to hear from you.

F.

[POSTCARD. POSTMARKED ON ARRIVAL: Berlin, December 24, 1915]

Dear Felice, just a few lines today; a postcard is also more likely to get there, and again my head is on fire. So to your main question: Certainly, I shall want to reorganize myself after the war. I want to move to Berlin, despite the official's notorious fear for his future, for here I cannot carry on. By then, though, what sort of man will be undertaking that move? To judge by my present condition, he will be a man who at best will be able to work for one week before finally reaching the end of his strength. What a night this has been! What a day! I should have left in 1912.

Kindest regards, Franz

[ON THE VERSO] Almost the first I knew about the Fontane Prize was from the papers; the publisher had vaguely prepared me for it some time ago. I don't know Sternheim,[22] neither personally nor by correspondence. *Metamorphosis* has been published *in* book form; it looks nice bound.[23] If you like, I'll send it to you. Erna's address? Did the parcel arrive safely?

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, December 26, 1915]

Dear Felice, very laudable, that trip to Garmisch. Certainly much healthier than anything else. I too—and not only on this occasion—have toyed with the idea of a trip to Prague. But all things considered, it's better that you don't come.—Muzzi's birthday present, depending on my taste, and on whether anything decent (above all, picture books) can be obtained in a hurry, will be packed up tomorrow.—I should like to ask for one copy of all snapshots taken in Garmisch. A Herr S. Stein, in whose house I am living, is now on a visit to his son-in-law, Dr. S. Friedländer, Charlottenburg, Kaiserdamm 113. Send him the photographs, then I'll get them quickly. But he is staying for certain only until the 31st; it is most unlikely, though possible, that he will prolong his stay.

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTMARK: Prague, January 18, 1916]

Dear Felice, actually the first time for 10 days that I pick up a pen in order to write something for myself. This is how I live.

I was unable to answer your last letter at once. It was not what I had expected; that picture of you in the snow was different. And yet, I do understand—and it is terrible. I know it, but I can't think of any solution, and I don't know where you could see a solution that hasn't been tried before. No change is possible now, but even later, even at best? At best I would come to Berlin, a man consumed by insomnia and headaches. (The other day quite unexpectedly I heard a piece of good news that didn't concern me personally in any way, but which in the past might well have made me happy for a while. But now my state of mind is such that for an instant this information made me literally lose all reason, and for a day and a night I felt as though a tight net with thin, cutting cords were clamped on my head.) So it's as this kind of man, Felice, that I shall be coming to Berlin after the war. My first task will be to crawl into some hole and examine myself. What will be the outcome? Needless to say, the living man in me is hopeful, which is not surprising. The thinking man, however, is not. Yet even the thinking man maintains that though in the end I do away with myself in that hole, I shall have done the best I could do at the time. But you, Felice? I have no right to you, not until I emerge from that hole, emerge from it somehow. So until then you too will not see me for what I am, because to you, and quite rightly so, I am at present—whether in the Askanische Hof, in Karlsbad, or in the Tiergarten—a naughty child, a madman, or something of the kind; a naughty child whom you treat with undeserved kindness, when it ought to be deserved.

This is the prospect that presents itself to my burning head. It could be attractive when standing on tiptoe; but since one cannot stand like this indefinitely, it is desperate, I don't deny it.

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Yesterday I received from your sister a charming letter which embarrasses me, because I can claim no merit whatever for dispatching the parcel to Muzzi; mine was merely the mediocre choice. (Of course, the 20 marks more than covered the cost of both

parcels.) A pretty picture of Muzzi was enclosed. A somewhat fanciful photograph. Muzzi holding a palette in front of a picture (stork with baby). What an intelligent, pretty, well-built child she is. I sent far too small and far too poor a selection—so it occurred to me at sight of the picture.

———

Your last letter was supposed to have enclosed a snapshot. It was not enclosed. To me this is a privation.

———

You complain of my not writing much. After what I have said, what am I to write? Is not every word a tug at the nerves of both writer and reader, nerves which surely need to be soothed, or rather need work, though work of a different kind: work that makes for happiness. Now that I think about this letter, it seems as though I had compiled it carefully in order to torment. And this I certainly did not mean to do; I meant just the opposite.

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, January 24, 1916]

Dear Felice—I accept the book with many thanks (I don't know it; all I know is that the man is a great friend of Dr. Weiss); but what about the reproach? Are not my letters more terrible than my silence? And my life even worse than that? And on the whole not unlike the tortures I inflict? But within my power and with your help I can see no remedy other than to wait, even if one is ground to dust in the process. I know of no other. What is silence compared to this kind of writing? Isn't the former more desirable? I would like to open a trap door under my feet, and allow myself to disappear to a place where the wretched remnants of my remaining powers could be preserved for some future freedom. That's all I know.

Kindest regards, Franz

[Presumably March 1916]

Dearest Felice! Making a cold the reason for my silence was simply a short cut. I did have a cold, and I did stay in bed for a day, then went out for 2 days, didn't like what I found outside, and went back to bed for 2 days—my cold, however, was not the real reason for staying at home; I went to bed out of general confusion and helplessness, hoping that this change, which I was still just capable of making, would bring relief. For I am desperate, like a caged rat, insomnia and headaches tearing at me; how I get through the days is quite beyond description. To be free from the office is my only possible salvation, my primary desire. There are difficulties: the factory, alleged indispensability at the office, which is very busy at the moment (incidental result: office hours of 8–2 and 4–6); but all these particular difficulties should be as nothing compared to the necessity of breaking free, compared to this continued downhill slide. But I haven't the strength; even lesser difficulties would be too great. It's not that I'm afraid of life outside the office; the fever that heats my head day and night comes from lack of freedom, and yet as soon as my chief begins to complain that the department will collapse if I leave (ridiculous idea, the absurdity of which is only too transparent), that he himself is ill, etc., then I cannot do it, the conditioned official in me cannot do it. And so these nights, these days, go on.

If you, Felice, are in any way to blame for our common misfortune (omitting for the moment my own share, which is monumental), it is for your insistence on keeping me in Prague, although you ought to have realized that it was precisely the office and Prague that would lead to my—thus our—eventual ruin. I don't say you wanted to keep me here deliberately, this is not what I think; your ideas about possible ways of life are more courageous and more flexible than mine (I am up to the waist in Austrian officialdom, and over and above that in my own personal inhibitions), so you did not have any compelling urge to consider the future carefully. All the same you ought to have been able to assess or at least to sense this in me, even against myself, even

contrary to my own words. In that case I would not have been against you for a moment. What happened instead? Instead we went to buy furniture in Berlin for an official in Prague. Heavy furniture which looked as if, once in position, it could never be removed. Its very solidity is what you appreciated most. The sideboard in particular—a perfect tombstone, or a memorial to the life of a Prague official—oppressed me profoundly. If during our visit to the furniture store a funeral bell had begun tolling in the distance, it wouldn't have been inappropriate. I wanted to be with you, Felice, of course with you, but free to express my powers which you, in my opinion at least, cannot really have respected if you could consider stifling them with all that furniture. An old story; forgive me. But immensely worthwhile discussing as long as it isn't replaced by a new and better one.

Affectionately, yours, Franz

[Presumably the postscript to this letter]

Everything I have written sounds so severe; I cannot send it off like this, for I don't mean to be severe, but I am so thoroughly lacerated and shaken that I cannot be held entirely responsible. I read, for example, that you have a cold, yet for a long time I cannot really take it in, I am so hemmed in by ghosts from which the office prevents me freeing myself. Day and night they cling to me; if only I were free it would be my supreme delight to chase them at my will, but as it is, they gradually do me in. As long as I am not free I don't wish to be seen, and I don't wish to see you. How utterly wrong you are, how sadly wrong, if you seek other explanations.

I have only just started reading the book; on the whole I stay away from everything, including books. It is extremely clumsy; but it does manage to produce one distinctive character, of whom for the time being I really don't know what to think. In any case I am not a critic, am no good at analyzing, easily misunderstand, frequently miss the point, and am left in doubt as to the overall impression.

Has *Tycho Brahe* arrived? I asked the publishers to send it to you long ago. And the *Jüngste Tag Almanac*[1] which I sent by registered mail?

[IN THE MARGIN] Thank you for the clippings. I have to spell out the word asbestos in order to read it, it's so remote from me.[2]

[TELEGRAM TO: Felice Bauer, Technical Workshop, Berlin, Markusstrasse 52. Prague, April 6, 1916]

passport refused kindest regards = Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Karlsbad, April 9, 1916]

Dear Felice—in Karlsbad for 2 days on business. Ottla is with me. The first thing we did last night—just as we went to Goethe's house on our first night in Weimar[3]—was to visit the Villa Tannhäuser. Everything here is different from last year, except for the usual bad night. I got your letter yesterday before leaving. Is it a good thing to write such letters, good for you, good for me? Certainly not. In view of the present situation it cannot possibly help. I can't come to Waldenburg[4] because, as you know, I can't get a passport—unless I have an official letter from Berlin confirming the necessity of my journey.

Kindest regards, Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] Kind regards, yours, Ottla

[Beginning of April 1916]

Dear Felice, your letter and the first pleasant spring day arrived together. It is also good to read what you have to say. But you

shouldn't deny how much furniture means to you, not those particular pieces of furniture, nor furniture as such, but the things that go with it, the things that are, so to speak, halfway between entertaining and domestic peace, the things for example that you considered "so delightfully cozy" at Waldenburg. This is neither hair-splitting nor nastiness on my part; while saying it I might well be holding your clenched hand in mine. The buying of furniture was fundamentally not your concern, but mine, and I did carry it out, if not very successfully.—I warn you, as well as myself, against meeting; think seriously of earlier meetings and you will cease to want it. Happily–unhappily you don't always suffer from toothache, nor am I always allowed to fetch the aspirin, nor always in a position, face to face in the passage, to show my affection. So no meeting.—Dr. Weiss, with whom I have been in constant correspondence, has been in Prague recently, will be coming back, and is then going to Berlin. Our ways have parted completely, at least for the time being, in circumstances precisely similar to those of that bygone scene at the Askanische Hof. This, I mean the similarity, is not particularly surprising. Ultimately the basic accusations that can be leveled against me are invariably the same, and their chief exponent and nearest-of-kin is, after all, my father.—The birthday present for your sister has of course been dispatched.—Are you being given a vacation?

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, April 14, 1916]

Dear Felice, I'm going to send more postcards from now on, letters are too slow;[5] in any case it is less a question of imparting information than of making sure of each other. At Easter I shall be in Marienbad, where I have some business to transact on Easter Tuesday. If possible I shall take my vacation as early as May. I simply can't stand it any longer. Actually, neither there nor here. My headaches were no better in Karlsbad than in Prague. I would be

better off at the front. Musil[6]—do you remember him?—came to see me today, a first lieutenant in the infantry—ill, and yet in fairly good shape.

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, April 19, 1916]

Dear Felice, how delightfully quick! Thank you also for the clippings.—As for Dr. Weiss, you misunderstood me. As long as I am no better, we want to have nothing to do with each other. A very sensible solution. Slightly marred, however, by the recent arrival of his new book.[7] But what an outstanding writer he is! You absolutely must read the book! Though he is in Berlin at the moment, I don't see that a meeting between you and him could possibly be of advantage to anyone or anything. On the contrary.—I am spending Easter in Marienbad, where I have some official business on Easter Tuesday.—The other day I went to see a nerve specialist; a pretty useless visit. Diagnosis: Cardiac Neurosis. Therapy: Electrical treatment. Went home, and wrote canceling the appointment. What would be the good of treating the consequences of a condition?—Enjoy your Easter. My journeys are invariably stripped of pleasure before they start.

Affectionately, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, April 25, 1916]

Dear Felice, I didn't go to Marienbad, the official trip had to be postponed, it may take place about mid-May; if so, I shall combine it with my vacation and stay in Marienbad for 3 weeks, lead a quiet life, the way I like it, and as far as headaches and self-reproaches will permit. But then I shall return to Prague to find my lot possibly less worth living for even than hitherto. And you? Your Easter? Your

vacation? Your chief? I have spent these Easter days all on my own, merely scribbling away for myself in order to see whether at the end of these 2 years I can still manage a single sentence; I have been moving back and forth between the street, my desk, and the sofa and, except for one day, felt reasonably well, except for one day when I was simply lashed by anxiety, and headaches sawed through my head. And herewith the rigmarole ends.

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, April 28, 1916]

Dear Felice, 3 postcards arrived today, two from Altwasser, where is that? And one from Waldenburg, written in good spirits, which delights me.—Of course I remember your aunt, despite the fact that where others store their memory for people, I have but a void. I hardly recall her face, but I do remember how very animated, interested, and communicative she was; I would have given her a long and active life. What did she die of? I remember very distinctly two occasions when she certainly had the upper hand. Once on the Hundekehlensee, and once in a coffeehouse, I think in the Tauentzienpalast.[8] The 3 of us were sitting squashed together at a table, and she was giving you advice for the future. Not appropriate —either for you, or for me.

Kindest regards, Franz

[TELEGRAM TO: Felice Bauer, Technical Workshop, Berlin, Markusstrasse 52. Prague, May 6, 1916]

> received letters only today no reproaches on that account please neither voiced nor silent affectionately franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, May 7, 1916]

Dear Felice—postcards again. I have had such a bad week that to write would have been an outrage. Many thanks for the letters and forgive my terrible lapse of memory. Even when I was in Berlin your relatives passed like shadows before my sleepless eyes, and since then my memory has certainly not improved. For some extraordinary reason I mistook Frau Klara (probably Levin) for Aunt Danzinger, and even incorporated her in Frau Wachsmann. Quite an achievement. Anyway I realize I haven't the faintest memory of Aunt Natalie; all I see in the direction of her chair—when we were sitting in that room in Berlin, the plans of the apartment spread out before us—is a dark blob.

Affectionately, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, May 11, 1916]

Dear Felice—but there are also other lapses of memory: for example, Frau Sophie's remark that I had written to her, etc. I don't remember having written to her since those far-off days when I begged her to find you, and she was kind enough to do so. And least of all with a complaint of this nature.—Meanwhile Weiss's novel will surely have reached you. Read it carefully; try to detect the man behind it. The parting of our ways—at first my doing, then his, and finally brought about by me—was perfectly right and the result of an absolutely definite decision, which for me at any rate is certainly rare.—My vacation is in doubt once again. I am going to Marienbad on Saturday, but probably on business only. More about this shortly.

Kindest regards, Franz

[LETTERHEAD: Hotel Neptun, Marienbad]

[Marienbad, probably May 14, 1916]

Dear Felice—on business in Karlsbad and Marienbad, this time alone. There are ghosts that haunt one in company and those that haunt one in solitude; now it's the latter's turn, especially when it's raining, chilly, and the yard is full of cab-drivers' gossip. Nevertheless I wouldn't mind staying here alone for several months in order to take stock of my position. Time passes, and one passes with it, pointlessly. It is rather gloomy, and one doesn't even need any special aptitude to be constantly reminded of these things. I feel like brushing the hair off your forehead, and consulting your eyes on the subject, but the hand sinks as it approaches.

My most determined effort so far to quit the office—higher degrees still exist!—is almost over, and almost entirely unsuccessful. The latest is that exempted men should have only a very short vacation, and even this only in exceptional circumstances—and as an act of favor. I made this the occasion—which was quite clever—for writing the director a letter in which, after giving detailed reasons, omitted here, I asked for one of two things: in the event of the war being over this autumn, for a long leave without pay; or, should the war not be over, my reclassification. You are bound to see the insincerity of it (the reasons given were even more insincere), and no doubt it is this that will rob me of success. The director considers my first request as merely funny, the second he ignores, and probably he is not altogether wrong if judged by the contrived reasons I gave (rewritten 3 times from beginning to end). He considers the whole thing simply an attempt to extort my usual vacation, offers it to me at once, declaring it had always been his intention to do so. I reply that the vacation had never been among my prime considerations, it doesn't do me much good, and I can do without it. This he does not understand, nor is he able to understand it. Nor can he imagine the cause of my nervous condition, so starts talking like a psychiatrist. Characteristically, after mentioning a number of worries that had tried his nerves and had been or were preying on his mind, but which could in no way apply to me, he said: "Besides, you need have no fears concerning your position and your career, whereas I in my early days had enemies who even tried to damage that mainspring of my life." Mainspring! Where does my

mainspring rise, and who tries to damage it? But while in fact it is being damaged, though neither with the tools nor in the manner my director imagines, I go on telling lies with the irresponsibility of a child, albeit under pressure. I can only cope with the simplest practical tasks by staging outrageously sentimental scenes; but how difficult this is! The lies and stratagems, the time it takes, and the remorse! And if it fails, all one can do is agree. But I cannot help myself. If I want to turn right, I first turn left, then strive sadly toward the right (automatically the sadness spreads to all concerned and is the most unpleasant part of it). The main reason may be fear: I need not be afraid of turning left, since I don't really want to go there at all. The way I resigned from my first job is a typical example: I resigned not because I had found a better job, though this was true, but because I couldn't bear the manner in which an old employee was being upbraided.—Well, enough for today, the sun too is beginning to break through.

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Marienbad, mid-May 1916]

Dear Felice, the letter was written on arrival during a tempestuous rainstorm, this postcard shortly before my departure. Karlsbad is rather pleasant, but Marienbad is unbelievably beautiful. A long time ago I ought to have followed my instinct which tells me that the fattest are also the wisest. After all, one can diet anywhere, no need to pay homage to mineral springs, but only here can one wander about in woods such as these. Just now in fact the beauty is enhanced by the peace and solitude as well as by the eager receptivity of all things animate and inanimate; while it is hardly affected by the overcast and windy weather. I imagine if I were a Chinese and were about to go home (indeed I am a Chinese and am going home), I would make sure of returning soon, and at any price. How you would love it!

Affectionately, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, May 26, 1916]

Dear Felice, for the moment just a word of thanks, above all for the picture. (Has your face got thinner?) Not knowing what to do with the other pictures, I am sending them to Max. I have been back from Marienbad for nearly two weeks, and for a great variety of reasons have not written. Driven all over the place, my headaches alone remain constant. Passport unobtainable. More about Weiss in due course. Amused by your inquiries about my uncle whom you insist on establishing in Milan, instead of Madrid. A minor satisfaction, though hardly to be compared to my treatment of Frau Wachsmann. —My long leave is meant to be what you suggest, though it is aimed at making the break easier rather than at safeguarding the future.

Affectionately, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, May 26, 1916]

Dear Felice, it's afternoon in the office, my headache is such that I can do nothing, neither work, nor read, nor sit still—"so you write to me," is what you think, yet this would not be a rebuke. Of course it is not always as bad as this, but for the last 3 days, continuous. ——

A nice picture; but in other pictures you do look more cheerful. Besides, the collar somewhat mars this one. Mephisto, if I am not mistaken, wears that kind of collar; I have also seen Strindberg in one, but you, Felice? Nevertheless a nice picture, with which you have given me a great deal of pleasure. And everything unchanged, the balcony, the trellis, the view. One tries to struggle through the memories of troubled times.—What is happening about your vacation? Your chief already gone? How about your family, and Erna, to whom I have not written for ages?

Kindest regards, Franz

[Presumably May 28, 1916]

Dear Felice, it's raining again, it's Sunday again, but I am not relaxing in Marienbad; instead I am back in the pit, in Prague, and for the past 5 days my head has been churning worse than it has done for ages.

Your judgment of Weiss's novel [*The Struggle*] is cautious, and this is right. I myself manage to achieve little more than an uncertain emotion—half love, half admiration. I know that the fire in the core of the book is a genuine element, but to surrender completely to an alien element presupposes madness. (Insomnia and headaches are merely preliminaries.) But it is strange that from this source a novel should emerge that a considerable number of readers will feel justified in regarding as little more than mere entertainment—which proves that they are unaware of its cutting edge.[9] You are aware of it. You say: "Perhaps this truth is more than I can bear." If I were asked to describe that particular effect, I would fail. I am incapable —now at any rate—of that kind of probing.

I agree, I do appear in the book, but no more than many others, for in this respect I am not an exception. It is the type that any West European Jew conjures up at once, at first glance as it were, the moment he sits back and closes his eyes. If these types were "powerful" into the bargain, they would be downright devilish; this is where Providence shows its kindness.

As for Franziska, I did want you to tell me more about her. Here, after all, lies the book's intention. Seize this, and you have the author by the throat.

I am surprised that you don't find much new in it. I find so much that I am at a loss. In fact, the apparent monotony is just the semiobscurity needed to make certain things tolerable to human eyes.

It's a long time, by the way, since I last read it, in manuscript. I will write again when I have read it in print.

In two weeks, especially if there is no improvement in my condition, I am going to Marienbad for 3 weeks. I did mean to stick to my resolve and refrain from taking a vacation at present, as I told

the director in my letter, but I can't stand it. By the way, the things they are prepared to put up with from me at the office surpass all office traditions.

What are you doing, Felice, in your spare time? It's ages since you wrote to me about this. Did you go and see *The Trojan Women*?[10] I saw it here a few days ago. Werfel's work is extraordinary, there's no doubt about that; but having seen the performance (of the Lessing Theater), I am more than prepared to renounce all further visits to the theater for the rest of my life, which in fact I have been doing for some time.

Affectionately, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, May 30, 1916]

Dear Felice, for your diversion I'm sending you two printed pieces: as a pleasant diversion a copy of *Zeitecho* with an article by Max[11] (enlarging upon these basic ideas, he held a course of 11 lectures this winter, as well as lecturing at the refugee school[12] for 2 hours a week to more than 50 girls, whom I joined on an outing the other day, and for 1 hour in a Zionist girls' club[13]); as a sad diversion my Institute's latest report, of which approximately pages 10–80 were written by me. You will be spared the Anniversary Report, running to 100-odd pages, as well as yet another annual report, the name of which I won't even mention.—Your Friedmann photographs were much appreciated, especially the love-scene.

Affectionately, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, May 31, 1916]

Dear Felice, in complete agreement, of course. But what is this suggestion about going to a sanatorium? Is it your own wish? That would surprise me. Or is it a concession to me? As far as I am concerned, I finished with sanatoria for good last year; sick people, among whom I now seriously count myself, should give sanatoria a

wide berth. This applies to me on my own; with you, however, any place will do. The only thing is: I cannot come to Germany, but you perhaps to Marienbad. Would you? There are no good sanatoria in Bohemia; the best, in Rumburg, is bad enough. For my part, I had intended to take my miserable head to Marienbad for Whitsun, but will await your decision as to both time and place.

Affectionately, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, May 31, 1916]

Dear Felice, to return to this morning's superficially treated question of sanatoria. My main objection to sanatoria is that they waste too much of one's time and thoughts. During my brief vacation I intend to do some work (as much or as little as this head of mine can still manage), and if you are there, I intend to be with you, but I do not intend to allow myself to be medicated, mudpacked, electrically treated, given therapeutic baths, examined, informed about the nature of my diseases with unusual accuracy owing to an unusually accurate diagnosis; it's another office almost, in the service of the body. For the moment, however, the deciding factor remains: why do *you* want to go to a sanatorium? Though there may not be a good sanatorium in Bohemia, there are some in Silesia, Lower Austria, Styria. All agog for your reply.

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, June 3, 1916]

Dear Felice, according to your letter your vacation starts on the 2nd or 3rd of July; according to your telegram which, after all, is far more recent, it doesn't seem to start before the middle of July. If there is no definite news by Monday, I will send a telegram.—In the huge book I keep about you, your cold as well as the "immense amount of work" will be entered on the debit side. That wouldn't be so bad; what is bad is that you torment yourself so much, while I, helpless on your behalf, helpless on mine, am obliged to look on.—In my opinion Sternheim's stories are remarkable, especially "Schuhlin," perhaps the weakest from the literary point of view. A very popular and very reluctant representation. We can discuss it perhaps.—May we be granted a happy reunion.

Kindest regards, Franz

[TELEGRAM TO: Felice Bauer, Technical Workshop, Berlin, Markusstrasse 52. Prague, June 9, 1916]

why no answer

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, June 14, 1916]

Dear Felice, so for the moment we are agreed, it is to be Marienbad. A medical certificate is no longer required in Germany, so you can definitely come. Despite my lack of talent in these matters, I had already considered your reasons in favor of a sanatorium, but in fact they could be used equally well against a sanatorium. And perhaps, though I am not sure, suffering, the passing of time, and other exceptional circumstances have raised us a little above these considerations. I should be glad to know the date we start our vacation about 10 days in advance—for I have some business to see

to in Tepl (very near Marienbad) and would like to take this in on my way, but must announce my arrival in Tepl 10 days before.

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, June 19, 1916]

Dear Felice, I would rather not go on ahead of you, would rather wait until you can go—provided it is before August, since in August I must be in Prague. But if you can go toward the end of June, it would suit perfectly, and perhaps by tomorrow I shall have the exact date from you. I would be glad, on account of my business at Tepl. Yesterday, by the way, Max decided that he and his wife will also be coming to Marienbad. The date has not been settled. His wife's youngest sister has died of pneumonia. Don't offer your condolences; she is dreadfully upset, and doesn't want to hear from anyone.

I have no wish to be there a week ahead of you because my three weeks are not wholly guaranteed, and anticipating your arrival would make me more restless than is good for one on a vacation.

Franz

[TELEGRAM TO: Felice Bauer, Technical Workshop, Berlin O 27, Markusstrasse 52. Prague, June 27, 1916]

arriving hotel neptun marienbad sunday evening july second

*Joint letter from Franz Kafka and Felice Bauer to Felice's mother*
[LETTERHEAD: Schloss Balmoral & Osborne, Marienbad][14]

July 10, 1916

Dear Mother, my right to this mode of address lies not in the past, but in the present. Felice and I have met (such things do happen) here in Marienbad and discovered that years ago we tackled things

in the wrong way. Nor was this very difficult to see. Good things, however, are not accomplished at the first attempt, nor at the second, but perhaps at the ten-thousandth, and this is where we now are. And where we mean to stay, and I believe I can be sure of your maternal consent dating from the days when you followed my last walk down Mommsenstrasse with a friendly wave from your balcony. Many things have changed since then, few for the better, this I do know; but one of the few is the relationship between Felice and me and its assurance for the future. This is what I wished to say to you today. Kissing your hand most respectfully, I send kindest regards to Erna and Toni.

Yours, Franz

Dear Mother,

I hope you will interpret Franz's words the way they are intended. Now you have the opportunity to give him your love all over again. If you want to write to Franz, he is staying on here for the time being, whereas I have to leave at the end of the week.

In the hope that everything will turn out well from now on, I send you my affectionate greetings.

Yours, Felice

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Marienbad, July 14, 1916]

My poor dearest, I am writing with your pen, your ink, sleeping in your bed, sitting on your balcony—this would be all right, but through the single door I can hear the noise in the corridor and the noise of couples on either side. Those damnable people downstairs, led by that little devil, have changed rooms, or rather they needed a double room, and so made the change.[15] Now that you have left, I haven't the strength to look for another room.—Two postcards for you from Frl. Erna have arrived, as well as one postcard and a telegram from Frl. Grete: there's nothing in them that can't wait

until you see them, except perhaps that Frl. Erna is kept on the run by her dressmaker.—I am on my way to the Dianahof, to think about you while staring at my butter dish. Many, many regards.

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Marienbad, July 15, 1916]

My dear Felice, to be alone yet not to have the consolation of a quiet room is hard indeed. Desperate, in terror of domestic noises, I spent yesterday evening desperately roaming about the municipal park—the park!—along the Korso—the Korso!—and yet returned far too soon, unwilling hearer of all noise. How on earth could you have endured that room! This morning I went in search of somewhere else to stay, but found nothing, since no one will let a decent room for only one week.—Instead of attending the laying of the foundation stone, I went to the Dianahof with *Erdmuthe*;[16] I hope you don't mind my not being able to describe the ceremony. At the Dianahof I struck up a conversation with Liselotte, the tiny round-cheeked one, and yesterday, while fastening a rose to her breast, I gave her a lot of advice.

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Marienbad, July 16, 1916]

Dearest, poor dearest (oh, how the old couple next door keep chattering), alone on the familiar walks, and yet on the whole it would be all right, except that I do nothing but rest. For I am confident as far as you are concerned, as confident as we can possibly be at this moment, after our fashion. You too should take advantage of this confidence, I do beg you. Start, perhaps, by giving up crunching lumps of sugar, the road to the summit is infinite. (Now the old gentleman is stumbling heavily out of bed.)—My

parting conversation with little Helen: “You gave us bad advice, that train had no connection.” “Didn’t it? I thought you were bicycling.” “We didn’t have bicycles.” “Didn’t you? In that case you could have gone to see Eger, very lovely.” “But we had announced our arrival for 11 o’clock.” “Had you? In that case you could have walked, lovely walk.” “But we had our luggage.” “Had you? In that case you could have taken the coach, lovely drive.” “Thanks, that’s what we did, but in doing so we used up the money for your tip.”

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Marienbad, July 18, 1916]

My dearest—first and foremost: headaches for the past 2 days, don’t know why or what for. Are they the aftermath? Or eternal companions?—Imagine, we were not even aware of the most distinguished visitor to Marienbad, a man in whom so many place their trust: the Rabbi from Belz, no doubt at present the chief representative of Hasidism. He has been here 3 weeks. Last night for the first time I joined him and some 10 of his entourage on their evening walk. A great deal could be said about it, but I have just written about it at length to Max who had informed me of the Rabbi’s presence here.[17]—And you, my most distinguished visitor to Marienbad, how are you? No news as yet, content myself with what the familiar walks tell me—today, for instance, the promenade of sulks and secrets.

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Marienbad, July 19, 1916]

[Written on the evening of July 18, 1916]

My dearest—while our old friends appear to have departed with you (did that delightful Kosteletz really exist?), new guests arrive, and yesterday on my way back from the Waldquelle they gave me something of a fright; for a moment I was quite stunned. Strolling along in comfortable Kosteletz-fashion—no hope of avoiding him—

who should come toward me but my director, not the one you know by his cough, but his superior with whom I am on good terms, followed by his wife and daughter. What a sight I must have been! There was no need to complain about my headache, which in fact I had, no need to point out that it was vital for me to spend my time alone in the woods—the sight of me was enough; I was surrounded by a trinity of compassion. Though I spent an hour with them, no future meeting was arranged. So once more I am alone; also without news, alas.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Marienbad, July 19, 1916]

Dearest Felice—am continually tormented by bad nights and headaches, and it worries me. Am not aware of an immediate cause, am calm and happy with regard to you. Is it because I have been dissipating my energies these last four years? Is this the retribution? Or perhaps it is merely the temporary effect of country air, which, by the way, gives me a huge appetite. Send me a comforting word. My state of mind won't let me work, but that's not the worst; anyway, what could I have produced suddenly in these 8 days; nor is this my time for work. But what is going to happen?—The invitation[18] to you has been dispatched, I wonder how you will deal with it and when.—On a typewritten postcard my father asks me to send you his greetings. I add them to mine and overwhelm you with the lot.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Marienbad,] July 20, [1916]

Dearest Felice—this time a genuine Frau Elster[19] has robbed me of an afternoon with you.—Slept rather better today, hence feel a little

easier, though no sleep after lunch. Last night (it was warm enough to sit on the balcony) I began to like my room. Today a new couple with some boys moved in next door (oh, for the dear old married couple!); the boys must be very adroit and lively, they have been hammering at a nail or something for the last 5 minutes.—Despite insomnia and my aching head I am getting fat, not as fat as my director, but in my own subordinate proportion. Yesterday's menu: at 10:30—2 milk, honey, 2 butter, 2 rolls; 11:00—¼ kilo of cherries; 12 noon—beef, spinach, potatoes, vanilla dumplings, roll; 3:00—cup of milk, 2 rolls; 5:00—chocolate, 2 butter, 2 rolls; 7:00—vegetables, salad, bread, Emmentaler cheese; 9:00—2 slices of cake, milk. Well?

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Marienbad, July 21, 1916]

July 20

Dearest Felice, very special thanks for Tuesday's letter; in addition, I have had three postcards as well in the last few days. Your influence over me, Felice, is great and good, and on the strength of the days we have spent together—despite the minor intermittent eclipses—I believe you will make excellent use of it. May it be the same for me with regard to you! There is a great deal to do, more for me than for you; even so, a great deal for both. It would be premature for my headaches to put an end to my strength now. It would be good if we could meet again soon.—I am sitting in the Dianahof, it's raining, I am unable to leave. I am slightly, but only slightly, melancholy and aware of my desire to watch someone at needlework, but not the kind the little girl is doing at the next table. And yet I am still thoroughly opposed to any kind of needlework.

Best regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Marienbad,] July 21, [1916]

Dearest—a little better again, not unbroken sleep, but dream-sleep at least ten times over; nevertheless sleep, and head improved. If only I could stay on here, adding an "improved" each day, then finally come straight from here to you, that would indeed be a blessed way of life. Not feasible, for I spend too much on food here, the menu I mentioned is repeated daily in ludicrous fashion.—Needless to say I wrote to Max long ago, am most anxious to hear what you think of the Jewish Home, and in what way you can help.—I have not been to see Felix. His first postcard from Karlsbad begins: "It's cold, foggy, it's raining, I am freezing, Papa is freezing, my wife is freezing. It's expensive, the bread is bad, the air is biting. I haven't got boils. My wife has a sore throat, etc." As you see, life isn't easy there, either. Let's hope he can last out his cure!

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Marienbad, July 22, 1916]

Dearest—am I overdoing the writing again, as in former days? In justification: I am sitting on your balcony, on your side of the table, it's as though the 2 sides of the table were the 2 sides of a pair of scales; as though the balance established on our good evenings had been upset; and I, alone on one side of the scales, were going down. Going down, because you are far away. That's why I am writing. Also because my head is still buzzing despite the improvement of the past 2 days—so, with my writing hand at least, I try to reach out for the peace I find with you. The silence here at present is almost as complete as I desire: the nightlight glowing on the balcony table, all other balconies deserted owing to the cold, no sound except a steady murmur from Kaiserstrasse which doesn't disturb me.

Farewell and sleep a thousand times more soundly than

your Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Marienbad,] July 22, [1916]

Dearest Felice, needless to say one cannot foretell how a postcard will be received by its recipient, I, alas, least of all—still, I have had no news for 2 days (one was so spoiled by being together, two steps to the left and there was news for the asking). Felix plus wife, brother,[20] and father are here today; I keep running back home for each mail and eventually find your dear, though grumpy, rather grumpy, though kissable postcard. No doubt, in a strange apartment one cannot expect to be undisturbed, but why try to stop me complaining on your lap, why not accept it as the act of devotion it is? And Liselotte? I have read that passage many times, and am still afraid of making a fool of myself if I were to take it seriously. Do you really think me capable of such bad taste as to—I won't say engage in—but boast about—that kind of thing?

It is the plump little 3-year-old girl, who once made us laugh at the Dianahof. She was given a rose, and that's what it was all about. Dearest Felice!

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Marienbad, July 23, 1916]

At our old familiar Egerländer.[21] So, as you see, after those many invitations we have finally met, too late for you.

Kindest regards, Franz

Am asked to convey regards from Baum and his wife.

Kind regards from Irma Weltsch

So we are here, after all, but, alas, too late. All that is left is the balcony. All the more sincere our good wishes

Felix Weltsch

Best wishes from Weltsch Senior

Paul Weltsch

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Marienbad, July 24, 1916]

Again and still at the Egerländer. Visitors upon visitors; as you see, people are trying to console me. Everyone is kind to me; even Kosteletz's friend, two tables away, is smiling amiably in my direction, evidently trying, without realizing it, to direct me to remember him to you.

Franz

My best wishes to you and all your dear ones

yours, Julie Kafka

If only I were Kosteletz—[22] and he were bellowing in my ear!
Thank you for your good wishes, I return them affectionately.

Yours, Valy

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, July 25, 1916]

My poor dearest (poor, because we are all poor creatures, and because, when incapable of helping, one pats the poor one's cheeks), back at the office, in the dregs of despair. Waiting for me, among other things, a letter from the publisher [Kurt Wolff] in which—no, they don't make sense just now, but things that 2–3 years ago might well have made marvelous sense.[23]—Writing to you from the balcony was intended to be my last act in Marienbad, but there was only time to take one quick look, and swallow ½ kilo of cherries. The last night, by the way, was the best, nearly 6 hours (to my knowledge) of uninterrupted sleep, an unprecedented feat for my nerves. (I am constantly being interrupted by people standing

around my desk.) But more things assault my head here than there, I don't know how it will go on. No doubt it is good that we cling to each other.—Surely the *Stoker* can't be out of print; it arrived in Marienbad, though rather late. I shall mail it. About *Erdmuthe* presently, the book is important enough for us. The Jewish Home? Kindest regards and pray accept my one eternal kiss.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] July 26, 1916

My dearest, it's a good thing that some of my postcards arrive together; they can then balance each other, since at the time of writing I find it hard to control myself.—You are mistaken in imagining that I am satisfied with your life if you go without lunch. On the contrary, it is a very bad arrangement in which I shall not acquiesce until you send me an exact report of your daily menu. Surely there must be an establishment in the neighborhood that produces something edible. In any case, let me know. The idea of your living all day on cocoa and a roll (*without even so much as Fletcherizing*[24]) makes me almost melancholy, especially in view of the vast amount of work you do.—I won't send you the story[25] just now, it's too complicated, it is yours just the same, even if it remains here with me.—Must you really go to the factory yourself? Couldn't one of them come over at certain times to inquire?

Best regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] July 27, [1916]

Dearest—after a morning's work. The only real knowledge I still retain in my head is that my room at the office and the woods in Marienbad simply cannot be compared.—Why the expansion of the factory? Is it a major one? Is it being done in connection with the

patent? Does it mean a lot of extra work for you?—You ask about my director: no, I didn't speak to him again, though I did catch sight of the entire family on several occasions; each time, however, I ran away like a schoolboy, once at a distance of no more than 5 paces. But on my last day I sent his wife 5 tree-size roses, and wrote, among other things, that "my irksome (a useful, indefinite word) condition had deprived me of the honor and pleasure of delivering them in person, etc." Not bad, eh? And not altogether untrue.—I send you greetings and kiss your hand to fortify those lips exhausted by dictation.

Franz

[IN THE LOWER MARGIN] Jewish People's Home?

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] July 28, 1916

My dearest—somehow, 4 days after my return, I can still feel the after-effects of that inner and outer calm which, with your help and that of the great forests, was granted to me in Marienbad. They are beginning to wear off, the after-effects—headaches, nightmares, the usual restless nights are once again coming to the fore; nevertheless I have gained a certain confidence that a little traveling and much rest and freedom may yet help to mend my disintegrating head. But it would have to be soon. As far as my office existence goes, the consequences of my gaining strength are invariably bad—renewed and greater rebellion, followed by an even more drastic relapse. I should like to know what Marienbad has done for you, and whether and how your present life differs, for better or worse, from the past.

Best regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] July 29, [1916]

My dearest—well, that's a fine state of affairs: the factory expanded, and you are alone. When you have extra work, I have extra work, too. With this in mind, I really don't know how one is going to cope with life in Karlshorst.[26] The one consolation is that it is not in fact additional work (apart from the reports for your chief), but merely additional responsibility, which indeed is bad enough. But write and tell me what kind of additional work it entails, and what it means in the way of time. What depresses me is that you are increasingly engulfed by your job. Are you working for Lindström as well? (What was the result of the disagreement about pay?) In view of all this, you certainly won't have much time for the Home, and *I am positively voracious for news of your participation.* What matters to me (as it will to you) is not so much Zionism as the thing in itself, and what it may lead to.

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] July 30, [1916]

Dearest—I am re-reading yesterday's postcard. What are you going to say to Dr. Lehmann?[27] In any case, put yourself at his disposal. With the exception of walking and gymnastics, there is no better way of spending the little free time you have than with him; it is a hundred times more important than the theater, than Klabund, Gerson,[28] or whoever else there may be. Besides, it is one of the most self-interested of occupations. One is not helping, but seeking help; more honey can be gathered from these exertions than from all the flowers in all the Marienbad woods. I don't know how you got the idea that only students are wanted. Needless to say, it was students (of both sexes)—commonly the least selfish, most determined, most restless and exacting, keenest, most independent and farsighted of people—who started the venture and run it; but everyone alive has as much right to be part of it.

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] July 31, [1916]

Dearest—several days now without news (I choose to say several, in fact it's only three). What with all the work now being heaped upon you, I am uneasy if without news for any length of time. As a matter of fact, my headache produces much the same result (I rarely sleep for more than an hour, go back to sleep, but again for no longer); a cool calm head sees things differently from a burning aching one. Horrible, horrible, above all on a beautiful day. Yesterday, Sunday (I stayed in bed until 12:30), was tolerable, and I spent the afternoon pleasantly—alone, walking, lying in the grass, drinking milk, and reading (Lublinski, *The Origins of Judaism*[29]). And you? By the way, do you realize that "wait, and soon" etc.[30] is not in fact a benediction, and even if it were, the "soon" is indeed questionable, or rather hardly questionable.

Regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 1, [1916]

Dearest—no news for four days, it is almost a little sinister, with a Sunday in between. I have found a new enjoyment for my free time: lying in the grass. When there is neither time enough nor inclination to venture out of town (for after all, it is quite lovely in the neighborhood of Prague, or so it seemed to me on Sunday), I lie down in the playgrounds where the poor sit with their children. It's not too noisy there, far quieter than at the Kreuzbrunn [in Marienbad]. While lying there the other day, almost in the ditch (this year, however, the grass is tall and thick, even in the ditch), a rather distinguished gentleman, with whom occasionally I have official dealings, passed by in a carriage-and-pair on his way to an even more distinguished party. I stretched myself and experienced the joys (though only the joys) of being déclassé. But you? You were with me on Sunday, so very much alive, and now there is silence.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 2, [1916]

Dearest—now the 5th day without news, I don't want to think that you are not writing, nor do I want to think of illness or something of that kind, yet it is all rather dismal, and my writing loses its point. Yesterday I sent you an issue of the *Jüdische Rundschau*; Max's article shows what he has been working on; the quotations from letters show the kind of girls involved; the feuilleton (not very well written) shows a strange Zionist atmosphere.[31] Anyway, you need have no qualms about the Jewish Home as regards Zionism, with which you are not sufficiently familiar. Through the Jewish Home other forces, much nearer to my heart, are set in motion and take effect. Zionism, accessible to most Jews of today, at least in its outer fringes, is but an entrance to something far more important. What's the good of writing? You are silent.

Regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 3, [1916]

Dear Felice—there was practically nothing about yourself in your postcard of August 1st which I had been looking forward to for a whole week. And my longing, after all, is for news of you, not for news about the little coat (the loss of which, by the way, shouldn't make you so "terribly annoyed." Let me have the necessary particulars to buy one, as well as your sister's address, and I will send her a little coat). I know you are extremely busy; but instead of the 10 lines about the coat, I wish you had written 10 lines about your work, your food, your state of health, giving me the feeling that you long to come closer across this distance which, thanks to the new passport regulations, has become virtually endless! What's

the good of complaining and writing! Let us return to writing every two weeks as before.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 5, [1916]

Dearest—long live the girl who is going to help you! What came of the undertaking you entered into with regard to your job? Good or bad? What do you mean by saying you will go out to lunch? Where to?—And Dr. Lehmann? On July 26th you said: "In any case I will write to Dr. L. tomorrow." On August 1st: "Some day I will write to Dr. L." And now, on the 2nd: "I will set about it very energetically." All in all this sounds like a lot, but hardly suggests an increase in activity. Anyway, I don't even know what you mean to write to him; surely the simplest would be to go there one day; after all, it is in Charlottenburg, so probably not very far.[32] Now, during the summer, there probably won't be too many evening functions.—What else? What are you reading? How about your Sundays? How is it you can go to see the painter[33] on a Friday? You have been to Karlshorst?

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 7, 1916

Dearest—better this way than the other, better for us to fail to draw close by means of the written word (I feel a lack of something in your recent postcards; they are like reports reduced to formulas; partly written with reluctance; the inordinate amount of work you do may well be largely responsible), better this way, I say, than failing to communicate by word of mouth. Hitherto, in this respect, we were under some fundamental misapprehension which Marienbad rectified. Whenever you used to try to shift everything

from the written to the spoken word, I imagined it was an evasion; but now I believe you were right. We will curtail our writing to the point where it does not interfere with your work nor (and this too is important to me) your work with your writing, forcing you to write ten cold, hastily thought up, absentminded lines, instead of one good, lively, felicitous one. This is not a reproach.

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, August 8, 1916]

August 7, on the stroke of 11

Dear Felice, this evening while thinking of you and feeling happy at being free to do so, in contrast to the days before Marienbad, there came to my mind among other things a certain passage from *Erdmuthe*. Not the one that I believe gives the book a special importance for us, in this respect it is not passages that are important, but the whole book; the passage I have in mind is so obtrusively didactic that I feel bound to quote it. On arriving after her wedding at her new flat in Dresden, which her Grandmother Zinzendorf had had furnished for the young couple in what was then considered an affluent manner, the Countess, aged 22, burst into tears. “It comforts me to think,” she writes, “that God is aware that we are not in the least responsible for all this frivolity. May He grant me the grace to prove myself His true child in other respects, for in this one I was unable to act as I wished. May He keep my soul steadfast, and avert my eyes from all the follies of this world.”[34]

To be cut in stone and set in place above the furniture store.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 9, [1916]

My dearest, beautiful, beautiful days. Whenever I have the time, the inclination, and the strength, I leave the city, not just to lie in

ditches. Up on a high roadbank near here, behind an orchard, there is a little wood at the edge of which I like to lie. To the left one can see the river, and beyond some sparsely wooded heights, directly opposite a solitary hill with an old house—mysterious to me ever since my childhood—delicately merging into the landscape, and all around me peaceful undulating country. And then the evening sun shines straight onto my face and chest.—My mother and Vally (whom no doubt you mean when you say Ottla) arrived yesterday; my brother-in-law is home on leave.—I don't know Telschow.—My writing is a matter neither of economy nor extravagance.—Kindest regards to Frl. Grete [Bloch]. What does she think of the Home?

Franz

*Franz Kafka's mother to Felice Bauer's mother*

Prague, August 9, 1916

My dear Anna,

It is already more than two years since we last wrote to each other, and what haven't we lived through in all that time! Painful events have outnumbered the happy ones. Now let us hope that fate will allow us to experience many joys through our children's happiness, and thereby amply compensate us for all the sorrows.

I meant to write to you before leaving Franzensbad, but found neither peace nor time to do so. What with doing the cure all day and keeping up an extensive correspondence with one's family, each day was too short. Well, on Monday 7th at 4 P.M. I left in great haste for Prague, accompanied by Vally; we arrived at 10 P.M. and all our dear ones, including Peppo, were at the station to meet us. We curtailed our cure by two days because quite unexpectedly our Peppo was given a fortnight's leave, and had sent us a telegram on Monday. Perhaps the happy excitement will help to rid Vally of her headache which the cure at Franzensbad failed to do. The doctor promised results within 6–8 weeks after the cure: well, one can but hope!

Now to our other problem-children. You can imagine my surprise when I received a postcard from Franz in Marienbad with good wishes from Felice in her own hand. Although I had always suspected that their friendship had not come to an end, her good wishes, nevertheless, were a pleasant surprise, and when they came to see us in Franzensbad we took great pleasure in her company. I could see the harmony of souls in the eyes of both, and so I hope that after the war they will find their mutual happiness. My dear husband is also very pleased to welcome our Felice as his daughter. I am very active again in the shop, since almost the entire male staff has been called up, and as a result I feel almost better than I did in Franzensbad. When one is accustomed to hard work, it is difficult to grow accustomed to rest and idleness.

And now farewell, let me hear from you soon, give my regards to all your children, especially to Felice, and accept all good wishes from

yours, Julie Kafka

My husband and children join me in sending their kindest regards.

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 10, [1916]

My dearest—what are the reproaches your mother levels against you, headache-making reproaches at that? There should be peace now, from that quarter anyway. Write and tell me about it.—One cannot say that you had an amusing Sunday. Why, on these few remaining summer Sundays, don't you go off into the country first thing in the morning? I careered around with Ottla (whom an official we met took for my bride) and ended up with sour milk in a garden.—You say you had just come back from lunch; where was that? Did the girl assistant, who should have arrived on Saturday, turn up on Monday?—Difficult to advise you what to read. Apropos

the Home, I suggest you return again to the *Memoirs*[35] I once sent you.—"She lets her work drop in her lap … most flattering …" but supposing she started choosing fresh colors at the critical moment?

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 12, [1916]

My dearest—the letter to Dr. L. is very good, exactly what I had in mind. But I couldn't have known that you had written it. Moreover, I confused the address with that of the Settlement Home; that is in Charlottenburg.—Your excursion to Friedrichshagen is highly approved of here; couldn't this kind of thing be repeated? The other day I took Felix and his wife to the little wood—described before, most inadequately—and received great approbation. It is an infinitely peaceful spot, where you are very much alive to me.—Otherwise, everything is pretty dismal; recently the headaches left me for 3–4 days, allowing me to see things more rationally for once; but yesterday it was bad, and today not much better. And on this note I grow silent on your dear hand.

Franz

[TWO POSTCARDS]

[Prague,] August 13, [1916]

Dearest, reading incontestable matters such as these, one becomes more and more confused: In 1876 Fontane accepted a civil service appointment as Secretary of the Royal Academy of Arts, and resigned from it at the end of 3½ months amid appalling quarrels with his wife. To a woman friend he writes: "The whole world condemns me, thinks me childish, crazy, high-handed. I am forced to put up with it. I have ceased to discuss it, etc." Later: "I have held this appointment for 3½ months. During the entire time I have derived not a single moment of enjoyment, experienced not a single

pleasant sensation. The job is as distasteful to me from the personal as from the practical point of view. Everything galls me; everything stultifies me; everything nauseates me. I have the distinct feeling that I shall always be unhappy, could become emotionally disturbed and melancholy." "I have been through dreadful times. And what had to happen, had to happen quickly. I may still possess sufficient strength and elasticity to get things back to where they were the day this disastrous appointment was offered to me. Other people's wisdom helps me not at all. Anything they can tell me I've told myself in 100 sleepless hours. One day I shall have to atone for it and the leisurely days (leisurely despite their horror-content) will have to be exchanged for those devoted to work." "One cannot strive against one's innermost nature, and in the heart of every man lies a Something that, once it feels abhorrence, will not be pacified or overcome. I had to decide whether to lead a dull life, devoid of light and joy, for the sake of material security, or etc."[36] So today it was Fontane who wrote to you instead of me.

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 14, [1916]

Dearest—I still don't understand the purpose of the undertaking you entered into. So there was no advantage in it from your point of view, in which case it was merely to be obliging on your part. Why were you asked to give it? And how was it given? And what would have happened if you hadn't given it?—The bar of chocolate for lunch depresses me, especially as I can also hear the crunch with which it disappeared. Or did the resolution to stop crunching include chocolate? The rest of your lunch was not up to much, either. What is the name of the restaurant? I should like to be able to picture it in some way. The hand that ought to be guiding you is now shaking with nerves.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 15, 1916

Dearest—about your anniversary letter[37]; to tell the truth, I actually don't remember the date; in fact, without an effort, not even the year. Had I been asked to give it straight off without assistance, I would have said it was 5 years ago. Needless to say that would be entirely incorrect, for 5 years it was not, it was either 4 years or 4000. On the other hand I certainly remember all other details far more accurately than you do, if only because at that time there was no reason for you to be so observant, isn't that so? You also falsify historical facts by saying that I did not accompany you to your hotel; I certainly did, along with Herr Director Brod. I remember every detail. I still know the precise place on the Graben where for no reason, yet deliberately owing to my uneasiness, desire, and helplessness, I stumbled several times off the sidewalk onto the street. And then instead of ignoring Herr Brod and whispering in my ear: "Come with me to Berlin, drop everything and come!" you were borne aloft in the elevator.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 16, 1916

Dearest—where, how, and whom did you consult on the subject? Who, where, how, and what information did you obtain? No, no, on a matter as important to me as this, you will have to be a little more specific. A pity it will take so long for me to get an account of Thursday, I can hardly expect it before Monday.—I could not immediately remember the table at the Café des Westens; all I saw was the smoke-filled room crowded with strangers all of whom knew one another, and where once I had been, alone and filled with sadness. Only later did I remember the lunch with you and Toni on the veranda; not that I was very gay on that occasion, either. But 4 years ago! What a charming, black-haired, strong-nerved, long-

sleeping, hardheaded (not metaphorically) young man I must have been in those days! You must write and tell me about it some time; bathing in your description may rejuvenate me.

Kind regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 17, 1916

Dearest, don't worry me, or at least don't make me uneasy by such vague allusions as are on Saturday's postcard. What makes you suddenly think of Franzensbad[38] and the last evening? What is it that keeps going through your head on that account? What don't you feel quite clear about? What do you find so hard to put on paper? (But so easy to worry about.) What is it that you could say so much more about? The fact that you were compelled to hint at these things shows that it would be important to speak frankly. I beg you to do so. I can admit neither considerations nor scruples. Being together, one can be silent; true, this shortens life, but then life on average is long. On the other hand, being so far apart, one should take every opportunity to speak frankly. For today, if you think of it, each of us is on an island from which the mailboat puts to sea but once a year. And then you choose to write in allusions?

Kind regards, Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] Please write "Pořič" more carefully; I feel apprehensive every time I read it.

[TWO POSTCARDS]

[Prague,] August 18, [1916]

Dearest—no news yesterday; "she" had no time or inclination to write to me on Tuesday, I thought; today, however, I get a letter and a postcard, very good and kind.—I am absolutely delighted that you are at last in touch with the Home. Where did you talk to the lady?

—The documents. Well, that's not easy. The birth certificate will be particularly hard to get. Besides, it is so long since I was born. I keep thinking that you handed my papers to someone in Berlin 2 years ago, perhaps to the Synagogue, or to some office, I don't know. In any case I will sec to it, though it will require an upsurge of energy.—We both see eye to eye about the interminable time, though I feel sure that each passing minute does not undermine you as it does me. However, it is better that way.—Just one request: you know my cousin got married. For a wedding present from my parents he has asked for a painting. I have written to an artist (of whom I think very highly and whose name I have mentioned once before): Fritz Feigl, Wilmersdorf, Waghäuslerstrasse 6. To reduce the price I—not altogether decently—have lied by saying *I* want to give the picture. Now he writes that the pictures I mentioned are in Cologne, and that he doesn't know which one of his Berlin pictures to choose for me. (At the same time he asks whether 200 kronen might not be too much. It is too much.) Shall I write and tell him to get in touch with you, and that you (with an unerring eye for the average Jewish wedding present) will make the selection? This would give you an opportunity to see much that is worth seeing—him, his paintings, his wife, and his apartment.

Kind regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 19, [1916]

Dearest—about the painter Feigl. I don't want to keep him waiting until I get an answer from you. So I am offering him 150 kronen (I regard the whole thing not as a purchase but a favor; it would still be a favor even at 200 kronen, though a more expensive one) and asking him, if he agrees, to get in touch with you by telephone and to select the picture with your help. Nor need I wait for your answer, for if by any chance you don't wish to be bothered with it, you can easily tell him on the telephone that in the meantime you

and I have agreed that he himself should select a picture. So you do as you please.

Franz

[TWO POSTCARDS. POSTMARK: Prague, August 20, 1916]

August 19, 1916

Dearest—no news, but the somewhat capricious mail service has one considerable advantage: in a case of this kind one can think merely in terms of delay.—If in order to survive the present moment one must continually have some immediate pleasure, then mine consists of knowing that you have begun to be associated with the Jewish Home.—I have been meaning to comment for some time on what you tell me about your mother: I understand both sides, not only that your mother wants to know certain things, but also (and this I understand extremely well, more so than you) that you say nothing. But surely it must be possible to reach a compromise. There is not all that much to tell her—at most some things to consider jointly. As for our union, it is certain, as certain as human beings can be; the exact time is only relatively certain, and the details of our life together in days to come (excluding Prague) we must leave to the future. Surely this much could be said even to your mother, though for me to say it would require a tremendous effort. But your mother's concern for our future is not merely the usual maternal one, and this too needs discussion, however hazy the future may appear at present.—On the other hand your mother's insistence on your being home for lunch on Sundays is quite incomprehensible to me. How can she insist upon it in this way, especially since you spend many evenings with your mother, and it is only a question of these few Sundays when the weather is fine. If you don't furnish me with a satisfactory reply, I shall write to your mother personally on the subject. This sounds very cross, but it couldn't be less so.

Kind regards, Franz

[THREE POSTCARDS]

[Prague,] August 21, 1916

Dearest, what you foresaw on Thursday morning for that evening was not the Dragonerstrasse,[39] but Friedrichshagen. From the point of view of health and scenic beauty, this was no doubt right, though somewhat disappointing to me in view of the inquiries you were supposed to have made on Sunday at the Café des Westens. Evidently the previous information you received was invalidated by Monday's information from Frau Dr. Zlocisti (who is well spoken of here. What was your impression?). I wanted to draw your attention to the great advantage you would have by being in an organization that is growing, yet incomplete, being able to participate from the beginning in all the mistakes made and all the lessons learned. I greatly look forward to hearing about it.—Fontane, yes indeed! You must not do his wife an injustice, no matter how wrong she was herself, and frequently at that. Although I did mention the year, I omitted to say that Fontane was 57 years old at the time, thus entitled to lay claim to certain rights even though they were in conflict with the claims made by a family with—I believe—5 children. He was in the right, but it was not a simple case. One more extract about his wife in that connection: "I would be forced to call her demands infinitely unkind if I did not assume that in her heart she had reassured herself with the famous platitude: 'People get used to everything.' This theory is false. I am as unsentimental as can be, yet it is undoubtedly true that countless people, old and young, have their hearts broken from grief, from yearning and mortification. Every day offers fresh proof that people do not in fact get used to everything. I would have been no exception, and if compelled to endure I would have either grown despondent, or undergone a sad transformation from the fresh to the stale, from the intellectually alive to the intellectually dead. That, no doubt, is what is called 'getting used to it,' but at what a price!"[40] All this is said more casually, more flippantly than it is meant, and may even be meant more flippantly than in fact it is, because Fontane, energetic as he was, simply disregarded it. But the demands he made upon his

wife to understand all this (I mean to live with it) were too severe, in my opinion it was impossible for her; she, of course, should have trusted him, and trusting him should have kept silent, but if throughout their long married life she had not learned (I mean trust and silence), one could not reasonably expect it now. Besides, in the absence of her letters, we cannot give her a fair trial. But enough now. I hope for news again tomorrow; I snatch at your postcards like the little mouse at the cheese in the trap, where to my horror I found it today in the office.

Kind regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 22, 1916

Dearest, find myself at the typewriter, so will try it this way for once. My typist is away on vacation, and at the moment I am almost sick with longing for her, since her male substitute, however patient, keen, and anxious he may be (from time to time I heard the pounding of his heart), keeps tearing at my nerves, though he doesn't know it. Well, she is coming back tomorrow—no, the day after. How about your assistant? There is no mention of her. A sudden thought: do use the typewriter one day, too. In which case it could well be longer than say last Sunday's note (nothing so far dated either Friday or Saturday), and typescript may pass through the censorship at greater speed.—So Sunday at the office as well, and for the second time, very bad. What's gone wrong? And no further news about the Home, great pity. Another thought, albeit an old one (they come upon me suddenly at the typewriter): Couldn't you send me a few snapshots of yourself? In fact, haven't you already promised me some?—Max and his wife are off to Marienbad today with my recommendations and our guidebook; it is a pleasant feeling to have, as it were, a representative in Marienbad again. It is so far away and so lost to us (the typewriter makes one tearful). Kind regards, needless to say, to Frl. Grete as well, as is always my intention.

Franz

By the way, did you read the *Jüdische Rundschau*?

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 24, 1916

Very pleased, Felice, I am very pleased with you; if only you weren't too far away for me to show you properly how pleased I am! I hope some communication from Dr. Lehmann will arrive soon, it takes so long. About your plan, which is a very good one: Both what you do and the way you do it are important; the latter of course is the more important, but the decisive factor, after all, is really what may develop from it: that the potential strength and contacts within an organization of this kind may come alive for you. In any case don't take on too much at first, both in consideration of yourself, since you are greatly overworked, and of the thing itself, of which you should first acquire an overall impression.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] No news dated either Friday or Saturday, lost?

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 25, 1916

Dearest, at a time when punctuality was still possible, one was not particularly anxious to maintain it, so now one ought not to complain. Yet complain one does on certain mornings.—Who is Fräulein Schwabe whose name I don't recall you mentioning? She does not appear to have talked very kindly about the painter Feigl, provided your doubts as to whether it would be worth visiting his home and his wife originated with her. In actual fact I know only him and his paintings, his wife very slightly, his home not at all. In my opinion the thing worth seeing from your point of view is the

exemplary quality of the place, a household based on much that is real, yet little that is tangible. Anyway, according to today's postcard ("we are greatly looking forward to making the acquaintance of your fiancée"), it will be mainly a question of choosing one of about 8 paintings of Prague, all of which I saw in Prague, though by now I am unable in my mind to distinguish one from the other; all I know is that at the time I stood and stared at all of them in admiration. At the moment the pictures are in Cologne, but appear to be on their way to Berlin. (Succinctly put!) He will telephone you when they arrive. And now I leap from the impersonal typewriter into highly personal good wishes.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 26, [1916]

Dearest, a good photograph deserving special thanks, since it appears to have been sent unrequested (though the request is in fact on its way). Black or bronzed, it is the way you hold yourself that's most distinctive; the white Fräulein Grete is extremely real; Frl. Schürmann was caught too suddenly for one to judge, unless one were to say that the face, the eyes, the nose, the smile turned out somewhat affected and sugary; next to that very handsome brother she finds it particularly difficult to hold her own. But this is not criticism.—I shan't be able to consider the Sunday business as solved until I get news of your first all-Sunday excursion.—Some of my questions remain unanswered; for example, what suddenly made you think of the last evening in Marienbad, etc.? Or the position with regard to your mother and our future?

Kind regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] August 30, [1916]

Dearest, no news for a long time. Here too things have been somewhat confused, but this is not unusual.—I wonder what sort of an impression you will get of Feigl. Your memory is correct; I wrote and told you about him, but I didn't go and see him in Berlin. What a pity that you will have sacrificed a probably beautiful Sunday afternoon to this visit. But only an afternoon, for at lunch you had visitors, which means that you didn't go to the country as you had meant to at the earliest opportunity and no doubt would have liked to, and this despite the people from Waldenburg[41] having left in good time that morning. So it is largely my fault on account of the paintings.—Jewish Home? I merely meant to add: Possibly and probably it will involve you in certain expenses. These, without exception, you must allow me to bear, so that, apart from the pleasure I get from your working there, I can participate in yet another way.

Franz

[TWO POSTCARDS]

[Prague,] August 31, 1916

Dearest, many thanks for the letter and its welcome amount of detail. There is indeed something disappointing about typescript; one is tempted to turn over the cold page to see if there isn't some living thing on the other side, nevertheless it has great advantages. Besides, it almost seems as though you feel more at home with the typewriter.—I like to think of you among people like the painter and his wife; by the way, I do believe one sees him more for what he is by first talking to him alone. Do you feel confident when it comes to pictures? I don't often. I did with 2 or 3 of Feigl's paintings. I believe he may have accomplished a great deal already. —They have now been married for 3 or 4 years. She struck me as somehow very cold, but I did realize that one could not judge her merely on one hour in a coffeehouse and ½ an hour's walk. Indeed they looked a somewhat strangely assorted couple, but since they themselves were obviously well pleased with their union, I too was

delighted to accept it. I hardly remember him from our school days. When I try to picture him, all that appears is something very incompetent and tall at the back of the classroom, but it is by no means certain that this is he.—What has a very powerful effect on me is his way of talking and thinking, half-crazy yet very methodical. Then there is his endless seeking and endless certainty which you, as I would too, call "instantaneous optimism," despite the fact that you could only have sensed it, since at tea it could hardly have been very obvious. I cannot understand the impression of boyishness vis-à-vis his wife, for surely, although cold, heavy, and proud, she does live entirely through his personality. So it seemed to me. Do you think the Paris picture would be a suitable wedding present? What is it? What size? And will he send it? We will pay 150 kronen, not much for the painting, a lot for the present. When you have time, write and tell me more about the afternoon. How you felt in that atmosphere.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] How does Frl. Bloch bear it, and what does it mean to her?

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 1, 1916

Dearest—yesterday's letter still makes me happy, two things in particular that were in it: powers of observation, and respect for the individual. Do write and tell me a little more about the afternoon, especially about what you saw. For, as far as I know, he [Friedrich Feigl] is engaged upon some vast project, drawings illustrating Dostoevski's major works for the publishing house of Müller.[42] Did he show you any of these? When I last spoke to them he and his wife were suffering from the same depression you mention. This time, however, it was justified, as I learned today from Feigl's brother who came to see me at the office.—I am deeply disturbed by

Fräulein Grete's suffering; I am sure you won't desert her now as, inconceivably, you have done sometimes in the past. (Indeed, I am the first to understand this; there are times when, while trying with all one's might to get inside, one is dragged straight out again by the scruff of one's neck.) By being kind to her, you are acting on my behalf as well.—Since yesterday, after 3 days remarkably free of headaches, I have been feverish—from the tips of my toes to those of my hair. By the way, about a fortnight ago I went to see a doctor who is as good as any doctor can be. (My fits of despair send me not through a window, but to a doctor's office.) But of this, more later.

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 3, 1916

Dearest, only a few words, I am very much behind time, Ottla is expecting me at the swimming baths, the blood—quite unsolicited—is racing through my head again, so for a while I must expose it to the air.—I haven't written to your sister yet, I have her address in a telegram, but so far I have been unable to find it. To you I merely want to say this: If the danger reaches her, then almost everything is lost. I by no means exclude the possibility, but at the moment it is unnecessary to worry about it. In any case I will write to her.—The desire to get your mother's future settled, Felice, was not in fact for my sake, but for hers (to tell the truth, I was thinking merely of the apartment problem), although it is a good thing to discuss it.[43] Your savings are a complete and well-nigh (don't be cross!) incomprehensible surprise to me. More about this soon.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 7, 1916

Dearest, three days without news, and then today the letter with the photographs. True, they are not very good, and one of them looks like a dress rehearsal for the mourning chorus in *The Trojan Women*; yet they affect me deeply and I clasp them to myself. Give me such pleasure more often.—Your question with regard to children is one of the most difficult, and probably quite insoluble. It actually plays the most important part in my fits of despair. It is impossible either to solve or to neglect. What a scourge this greatest of powers has been turned into!—The way you put the question, incidentally, does make it rather easier to answer. In each of the three marriages there is an obvious explanation, or rather an attempt at justification. No one wants to be unjustified, or at least not without having made the attempt at justifying himself, or rather, not so much himself as the relationship. For women it is both a wrong and a privation, for men I dare say it is simply a wrong, but one which has to be atoned for in many ways. Is that more or less clear?

While about to finish this postcard at home, I see an announcement in the *Berliner Tageblatt* (evening, Sept. 5) of the exhibition "Mother and Infant" and the lectures to be held there.

Kind regards, Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] I am definitely not against the typewriter.

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 8, 1916

Dearest, your letters of the 5th and 6th arrived today, many thanks. You write about apartments. How I longed for silence yesterday—complete, impenetrable silence! Do you think I shall ever achieve it as long as I have ears to hear with and a head producing within itself a profusion of the inevitable clamor of life? Silence, I believe, avoids me, as water on the beach avoids stranded fish. Yesterday afternoon I spent an almost rapturous hour with a book, *Dostoevski* by Otto Kaus.[44] In Marienbad I showed you a snapshot of Blei,[45]

with a young man in uniform beside him, that is Kaus. I cannot recommend the book to you because, to begin with at least, it seems almost incomprehensible, but with a certain attitude of mind available to anyone who is familiar with literature and our time, it becomes very simple, almost too simple.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 9, 1916

Dearest, I still haven't got your sister's address, but surely you will have recovered from the initial excitement by now. The whole thing is not urgent, merely desirable.—Since you got on so well with the Feigls, and since they are sure to be going away, you might perhaps pay them a farewell-cum-condolence visit. Or better still, perhaps just send them an appropriate postcard. He hasn't written to me yet, nor have the pictures arrived. Incidentally, he is said to have received an exceptionally nice letter from the director of the National Gallery (Bode?)[46] with regard to his graphic work, a letter written with the express purpose of removing the cause of his depression. Moreover, things cannot be as bad as all that with his wife if she continues to show such an interest in clothes—especially since you, after all, were not dressed in mourning. I assume your remark about the similarity of all women was made in order to frighten me? As a sign of trust, I will accept even this remark.—I am looking forward enormously to your account of Thursday evening.—As to papers, no doubt I need only my birth certificate and that of domicile. I hear they are quite easy to obtain. It's simply a matter of giving a few hours to it.

Kind regards, Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] Just now the younger [Ernst] Feigl brought me his poems—rather obscure, extremely earnest things.[47]

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 10, 1916

Dearest, in Sunday-haste. Going off again with Ottla. The day before yesterday was a holiday, we went to two marvelous places I discovered recently, again near Troja but far more beautiful than the edge of that wood.[48] The one, still in long grass, is surrounded by low banks at varying distances, yet completely closed in and entirely exposed to the radiant sun. The other, not far away, a deep narrow undulating valley. Both as silent as the Garden of Eden after the expulsion of Man. To disturb the peace I read Plato aloud to Ottla; she taught me to sing. Somewhere in my throat there must be gold, even if it does sound like tin.

Kind regards, Franz

September 11, 1916

Dearest, it's early yet, work is waiting, my chief is waiting, my head —once again without enough sleep—would probably prefer to rest on the back of the chair, and yet here I am sitting at my typewriter, for you. For it does seem as though the pleasure your letter gives me can only be expressed in plenty of space, with room for all my elbows. That you have at last got together, you and the Home, is certainly the most important thing; everything else—being a good, indeed the very best thing that could happen—will solve itself. As far as is permissible from here, I am in complete agreement with your opinion of the external aspect, with your criticism as well as your praise (though I wouldn't want to accept the piano as a model for the furnishing of our apartment); but all this is in anticipation, and incidental. The main thing is the human element, only the human element. I would very much like to hear more about this. And a few words about Dr. Lehmann, and indeed about his lecture. I don't understand the contradiction of your not having been much surprised by what you heard (I suppose this was meant to be slightly derogatory), and yet having been puzzled for a long time by the ideas expressed in the lecture (surely this would show too much

rather than too little surprise). By the way, so far as the lecture is concerned, you seem to have been especially lucky, since it dealt with the fundamental question which in my opinion can never lie dormant, but will continue to flare up time and again, to disturb the very foundations of Zionism. But just this initial work, also as far as you are concerned, is perhaps still relatively the best protected against those disturbances, and perhaps—too big a perhaps, the word refuses to be uttered. In any case, for the kind of work to be done there at first, even a faint breath of the spirit pervading the *Memoirs*[49]—which I sent you some time ago, and which I warmly recommend to you once again and forever—would be sufficient. So it is about the people who were there that I want to hear, also about the girls whom you think I would have considered very beautiful. Were some of the children from the Home also present? Was there a discussion in the course of which one could form an idea of any one person? I am glad Frl. Bloch was there, too. What does she have to say about it? What pleases me especially about the whole thing is that I somehow felt (it is most imprudent of me to tell you, but there is no room for prudence between us now, since the subject is too important and you and I too close) that the opening up of these new fields is bound to make you realize that so far you have been partly (only partly, no one can wholly deny himself, indeed if you think anything of me, you are sure to feel the same about me) deflected from the really important matters that were able to arouse the best of your powers: that your office, your family, literature, the theater were able by their very nature to claim only part of what is best in you; that here, however, lies the actual connecting link which in its turn will let everything else, including your family, etc., benefit by what is best in you. In saying all this I have deliberately not touched upon that which concerns us and our relationship; on this subject let us be silent. But if in fact some echo of these ideas—not just from that chance evening, but of the whole project and its possibilities—should have fallen upon you (and by spreading to your surroundings, also upon Frl. Bloch), I should be very happy.

As for my headaches, they have been variable recently, therefore on the whole quite bearable, however bad on certain days of

martyrdom. The doctor whom I went to see, and who examined me as carefully as doctors generally examine one, was very pleasant. A quiet, rather funny man who nevertheless, by his age and physical bulk (how you could ever come to trust anything as long and thin as me is something I shall never understand)—as I was saying, by his bulk (thick lips, a broad rotating tongue), his neither excessive nor affected sympathy, his modesty in medical matters, as well as some other traits, inspired confidence. He declared he could find nothing but extreme nervousness. His suggestions were actually very funny: not too much smoking, not too much to drink (though a little now and then), eat more vegetables than meat, preferably no meat for supper, a visit to the swimming baths from time to time—and at night lie down quietly and go to sleep. This final suggestion in particular was presented in a most appetizing fashion. That was about all.

But now I really must stop; I have already been interrupted 5 times, each time more menacingly.

That Fräulein Schwabe, so far only vaguely mentioned, was she at the Home, too? As far as the necessary as well as the merely desirable expenses in connection with the Home are concerned, you will, in accordance with my request, allow me to bear them? By the way, I recently gave Max a copy of the *Memoirs*, and I am about to give one to Ottla; I am giving them away right and left. They are more appropriate for this day and age and more to the point than anything else I know, as well as being the liveliest encouragement.

Kindest regards, Franz

September 12, 1916

Dearest, I hinted at some of the things you ask me about in yesterday's reply, though not the most important ones. I am unable to put it in writing, and that I shouldn't even be able to talk about it is my consolation. On this subject my ideas are not as clear as you, being what you are, quite rightly demand; they are not even clear in the negative sense; yet even if they were, I believe I should hesitate

to communicate them. By submitting to you certain magazines and books I might have tried to guide you toward an intellectual climate which I considered suitable for you. But I refrained; it wouldn't have been any good; this kind of feeble guidance can produce nothing but feeble results, quite apart from the fact that you could have evaded it by a mere turn of the head, as you did for instance over the *Memoirs*. Rightly evaded it, I should add, for this attempt at incoherent contact with you from afar bordered on the irresponsible. That's why I was so pleased in Marienbad when, without my having expected or intended it, you tackled the idea of the Home quite independently and very well, and now intend to let it lead you on. Only the reality of the Home can teach you anything of importance—any reality, however small. Don't be prejudiced in favor or against, nor let the thought of me affect your open mind. You will see those in need of help, and opportunities of giving help judiciously, and in yourself the power to help—so help. It is very simple, yet more profound than any fundamental ideas. Everything else you ask about will, if you go through with it, follow quite naturally from this one simple fact. As far as I am concerned, please consider that this work removes you to some extent from me, since—in any case at present, and I am not thinking of my state of health in this connection—I wouldn't be capable of doing this kind of work; I would lack the necessary dedication. However, this is only to some extent. On the whole I can think of no closer spiritual bond between us than that created by this work. I shall live on every small thing you do, on every difficulty you shoulder (though it must not be detrimental to your health); I shall live on every one of these things, as on your last letter. As far as I can see, it is positively the only path, or threshold to it, that can lead to spiritual liberation. The helpers, moreover, will attain that goal earlier than those who are being helped. Beware of the arrogance of believing the opposite, this is most important. What form will the help in the Home take? Since people are sewn into their skins for life and cannot alter any of the seams, at least not with their own hands and not directly, one will try to imbue the children—at best respecting their individual characters—with the spirit and more indirectly the mode of life of

their helpers. In other words one will try to raise them to the standard of the contemporary, educated, West European Jew, Berlin version, which admittedly may be the best type of its kind. With that, not much would be achieved. If, for instance, I had to choose between the Berlin Home and another where the pupils were the Berlin helpers (dearest, even with you among them, and with me, no doubt, at the head), and the helpers simple East European Jews from Kolomyja or Stanislawow, I would give unconditional preference to the latter Home—with a great sigh of relief and without a moment's hesitation. But I don't think this choice exists; no one has it; the quality corresponding to the value of the East European Jew is something that cannot be imparted in a Home; on this point even family education has recently been increasingly unsuccessful; these are things that cannot be imparted, but perhaps, and here lies the hope, they can be acquired, earned. And the helpers in the Home have, I imagine, a chance to acquire them. They will accomplish little, for they know little and are not very bright, yet once they grasp the meaning of it, they will accomplish all they can with all their hearts, which on the other hand is a lot, this alone is a lot. The connection between all this and Zionism (valid for me, not necessarily for you) lies in the fact that the work in the Home derives from Zionism a youthful vigorous method, youthful vigor generally, and that where other means might fail it kindles national aspirations by invoking the ancient prodigious past —admittedly with the limitations without which Zionism could not exist. How you come to terms with Zionism is your affair; any coming to terms with it (indifference is out of the question) will give me pleasure. It is too soon to discuss it now, but should you one day feel yourself to be a Zionist (you flirted with it once, but these were mere flirtations, not a coming to terms), and subsequently realize that I am not a Zionist—which would probably emerge from an examination—it wouldn't worry me, nor need it worry you; Zionism is not something that separates well-meaning people.

It is late, and for two days now both head and blood refuse to be pacified.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 13, 1916

Dearest, no news today. It really doesn't matter if my last two letters contained only a little of what you wanted to hear. After all, I hope we shall have frequent opportunities to correspond on this subject. How successful was the apartment hunt which of course has my full approval? Holding on to the old apartment was a delusion, albeit a reverent one, as delusions often are. What was that inspection you had to carry out on Friday? And why is the dentist, who always fills me with horror, looming up again?—Naturally, I was amazed by the inconceivable amount of your savings. You must have magic in your fingers; the money that flows out must have a devious way of flowing back again. In such matters my official's hands quite lack the magic touch.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] I hope to get the report about Monday by Friday at the latest.

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 15, 1916

Dearest, postcards of the 11th, 12th, and 13th and the letter of the 12th arrived today. This accumulation partly balanced the bad news, though quite enough headaches, toothache, and misery were left. I thank you for myself, and for you, and for the two of us, for your regular visits to the Home (an exaggerated word for the first week, but you will justify it). It is a great help that you like the outward appearance of the whole thing; you could so easily have been put off by it—not that this would have diminished its value. You have been spared this particular test, which of course doesn't

mean there won't be others. As for your question, I will write and tell you shortly; today I have to make do with a bad typewriter and haven't much time.—One more thing: The other day I was invited to give a reading in Munich, as part of a course entitled "Evenings for Modern Literature." I wouldn't mind, I like reading, and perhaps you could come, too (on October 6th or 11th). But the passport difficulties, which for this purpose might not be insuperable, are nevertheless too great for the amount of energy and time at my disposal. So I may well have to refuse. Great pity. On that evening I was supposed to have done a reading with Wolfenstein.[50]

Kind regards, Franz

[FOUR POSTCARDS]

[Prague,] September 16, 1916

Dearest, again just a few words, but intimate ones. It is the Home that brings us so close. Don't be afraid of the girls' questions, or rather, be afraid of them, and regard this fear as the most beneficial part of the Home. Actually, it's not the questioning you fear, it is also the unasked questions that you will sometimes find frustrating; nor is it merely the questions asked by these girls, but also those asked by the menacing or benevolent "useful people" of whom you wrote so kindly and devotedly. On the whole it will be up to you to get them to trust you in other than religious matters and, where the sharing of religious experience is needed, to let the dark complexity of Judaism, which contains so many impenetrable features, do its work. Nothing of course should be blurred in this way, as people are inclined to do here. In my opinion this would be entirely wrong. I wouldn't think of going to the synagogue. The synagogue is not a place one can sneak up to. One can do this today no more than one could as a child; I still remember how as a boy I almost suffocated from the terrible boredom and pointlessness of the hours in the synagogue; these were the rehearsals staged by hell for my later office life. Those who throng to the synagogue simply because they are Zionists seem to me like people trying to force their way into the

synagogue under cover of the Ark of the Covenant, rather than entering calmly through the main door. But as far as I can see, it is quite different for you than it is for me. While I should have to tell the children (it is unwise, of course, to encourage such conversations, and on their own they would arise but rarely, for town-bred children have sufficient experience of the world and, if they are East European Jews, know how to protect themselves and at the same time to accept the other person) that owing to my origin, my education, disposition, and environment I have nothing tangible in common with their faith (keeping the Commandments is not an outward thing; on the contrary, it is the very essence of the Jewish faith)—thus, while I would somehow have to admit it to them (and I would do so candidly, for without candor everything would be quite pointless in this case), you on the other hand may not be altogether lacking in tangible connections with the faith. They may of course be merely half-forgotten memories buried beneath the clamor of the city, of business life, and of the tangled mass of discussions and ideas assimilated over the years. I don't mean to say that you are still standing on the threshold of the door, but perhaps somewhere in the distance you can just see the gleam of the door handle. I mean that in reply to their questions you might be able to give the children at least a sad answer; I could not do even that. But this would be enough to gain their trust in every case. And now, dear teacher, when are you to start?

I have written to your sister. Since on the one hand you did not refute my counterarguments but on the other did not suggest I shouldn't write, I wrote a halfheartedly convinced, and correspondingly convincing, letter.

Franz

September 18, 1916

Dearest, lunch can wait, first I must reply briefly to your letter.—You are tackling the matter both calmly and enthusiastically, which is good. The Sunday excursion may have been of importance for

you. Here, by the way, it was a lovely day. We, Ottla and I, freezing a little despite the bright sun immediately facing us, sat above a lovely valley, undulating and not very wide, with a grand panoramic view in all directions. We read Strakhov's "Recollections of Dostoevski."[51] From now on, however, I shall read nothing but Foerster's *Jugendlehre.*[52] I am not familiar with Foerster, but have heard him greatly praised, though I have been rather perplexed by some of the examples I have heard quoted from the book (much appreciated by Felix). In this case, however, the same is true as in all the work done for the Home: for real practical work, pedagogics cannot be learned; but with the help of a sensible book on the subject, one's own pedagogic capabilities can be awakened, can become conscious, and appraised; more than this a book cannot do, nor should one expect it to. Your first suggestion which was accepted seemed to me right, the second open to doubt. If Foerster were read as part of the course, one would probably be tempted not to read him at home, or to read him carelessly, whereas, by the method adopted, obviously everyone anxious to follow will read the whole book, and not merely the section allotted to him. Hence the doubts you raise need not be taken too seriously. Everyone will get to know Foerster by reading Foerster, and if from her précis he gets some idea of Felice as well, so much the better, especially in view of the purpose that I believe a pedagogic book can have for the work. According to the heading, you seem to have taken on one of the most important chapters. Why only after a struggle? Doesn't everyone take part?—I will try to obtain literature about the Home in Vienna. Perhaps you could give me some more specific information on the subject. I should also like to hear a little more about the earlier lecture on religious education.[53]—Was Frl. Bloch there, too?

Perhaps I am asking too much of you, considering the vast amount of work that falls upon you. I can only say that, however much work I cause you, the pleasure your letters give me is infinitely greater, diminished only by the thought of your being grossly overworked. Is your chief in Berlin? Have you got an assistant?

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 19, 1916

Dearest, today no news. I had Foerster's *Jugendlehre* sent to you yesterday, an unbound edition, so that even if by now you own a bound copy, you can have one that can be taken apart, and won't have to keep running around with the heavy volume. I looked through it yesterday, even read your chapter from beginning to end (despite positively radiant headaches). Of its kind it is an admirable book, even though to my mind a number of things might be said about and around it. I must have sat on the edge of my bed for an hour yesterday without lying down, just thinking about it. Now, however, after a morning at the office, it is no longer as clear in my mind. Your section can be summarized easily in 30 sentences. Send me a copy of your précis, and then we can discuss it further. Also send me a few words about what I wrote to you.—How was it possible that in spite of all your efforts you were unable to find an apartment? That augurs ill for future apartment hunting. I may be able to go [to Munich] after all. I heard today, though, that it was Max who arranged the invitation; my inclination to go has diminished correspondingly. Would you undertake the immense journey? Not in order to attend the lecture, that was not what I wanted, but in order to spend a few hours, it may be a matter of 5 hours or so, with me. But it isn't definite yet.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 20, 1916

Dearest, good, indeed very good, that you took part in the excursion. But a 4-hour walk is almost too much for a girl exhausted by a working week, even though it makes up for the lack of air and exercise during those evenings at the Home. In any case take care of

yourself, don't do too much; one evening a week Foerster and one evening lessons should certainly be the utmost, and if you devote every other Sunday to it as well, you have done your share. You could add to my pleasure by doing gentle exercises one evening a week, according to the program announced back in Marienbad.—Have you heard any more from [Friedrich] Feigl, or written to him? I assume he is coming to Prague, nevertheless it is strange that he neither writes nor sends the picture. I have had no Saturday news from you. Lost?

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] How about the dentist?

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 22, 1916

Dearest, I never really expected you to attend the other course as well. Will you be able to take on all this without overexerting yourself on the one hand, and diminishing your receptivity and efficiency on the other? The discussion you describe is typical; theoretically I am always inclined to favor proposals such as those made by Herr Scholem,[54] which demand the utmost, and by so doing achieve nothing. So one simply mustn't appraise such proposals and their value by the actual result laid before one. Incidentally, I think this is generally applicable. Actually, Scholem's proposals in themselves are not impracticable.—I am very pleased that you get on well with the girls and that you have hopes of getting to know them better. What would be very harmful in this connection, however, is a kind of self-satisfaction, a hint of which—though so small that it may be invisible to all but my own anxious and particularly searching eye—can be detected in your letter when you "wish one could give them a great deal and mean much to them." One should never believe that one deserves the children's gratitude, but should always remember that it is oneself who has to

be grateful. If one has nothing to be grateful for, one is in the unhappy position of a schoolmistress who is not even paid for her ordeal. The very symbol of hell.—Which reminds me, your old story [“The Judgment”] is to be published soon. I have replaced the outdated dedication[55] with: “To F.” Is this all right with you?

Kind regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 23, 1916

Dearest, no news; this week had only Monday’s postcard and letter. —Today’s lovely weather has somewhat revived me again. Perhaps you too will have another lovely, though I hope less strenuous, Sunday with the children. I wish I too could sit beside you in the compartment and ask if I might ask a question. In that case perhaps my everlasting restlessness would cease. Far too often I suffer mentally the physical sensations of a shipwreck when the body is swept mercilessly up and down amid gigantic waves. I keep meaning to tell you about the following: Do you remember the short piece of prose that was supposed to have appeared in *Der Jude* as a postscript to an article of Max’s? The consignment was first lost, then sent again at a later date, and finally Buber accepted Max’s article with some reservations (which I too considered the only sensible thing to do), but rejected my “Dream,” though in a letter more complimentary than any ordinary letter of acceptance could have been.[56] I mention this for two reasons: firstly because the letter gave me pleasure, and secondly, by this trivial example to show you, with an official’s typical apprehension, the precariousness of my financial and intellectual existence. And even supposing I do one day accomplish something (my restlessness won’t let me write a line), it is quite possible that even people who are well disposed toward me will turn me down, and the others of course all the more so.

Kindest regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 24, 1916

Dearest, such a beautiful day that I even managed to get out of bed in the morning and in passing looked in at the office to inquire; not in vain, letters of the 21st and 22nd were there. I don't know how to convey to you the pleasure I derive from them. It is almost as though the girls were my children and had acquired a mother (belatedly?) or as though you were my child and in your turn had acquired a mother in the group, or as though I were sitting somewhere in peace, and much-needed rain was pouring down upon my land. And the miraculous thing about all this would be that I don't really deserve it, but that, owing to some hidden universal law, my not deserving it cannot be held against me.—I will write at length tomorrow, or send you the précis as I imagine it. As an introduction I consider "Schlemihl" rather good and I will have 10 copies of "Schlemihl" with illustrations from *Die Weltliteratur*[57] sent to you tomorrow.—In my thoughts I follow you with giant strides on your way to Mühlbeck.

Franz

September 25, 1916

Dearest, now the précis, I hope you will get it in time; I am improvising it very hurriedly for I have been unexpectedly busy today, and besides, for various reasons and nonreasons, I have not spent much time on Foerster since that first reading. And so today, in order to write the précis on your chapter, I had to race through the first 48 pages clenching my teeth. So let us begin. No, before I start: I too believe it's right to go through the whole thing first, three parts reading, one part discussion, and then, as the lecturer who has read his particular chapter with particular care and is intent upon communicating this advantage to the others, to summarize the whole thing in short sentences. Moreover, I don't think it is the lecturer's business on this occasion to express doubts about the justification of some of Foerster's assertions, but I do

consider it necessary that a special evening, or a lecture at the end of the whole course, or perhaps at the end of the theoretical part, should be set aside for the discussion of doubts raised by some of Foerster's statements. In this case I would be very glad to draft something for you in accordance with my ideas on the subject. Well, now for the précis:

So far the general aspects of Foerster's method of ethics have been presented—actually in 2 main groups, one suggesting that the children should be guided from everyday life toward moral laws, the other guiding them back from moral laws toward everyday life. Both of these, which of course have to be organically combined, apply to moral teaching as such, as well as to purely academic instruction. In the chapter under discussion the investigation is confined to moral instruction as applied to the different subjects of academic instruction. The subjects to be dealt with are the natural sciences—in particular physics, physiology, and astronomy; furthermore the study of languages, history, literature, singing, and music. Geography is hardly touched upon.

In the natural sciences it is more important than elsewhere to establish a connection with ethics, for here lies the true—in itself not inevitable yet actually existing—cause for a departure from moral laws. Two examples of moral reaction are given: An illustration (for children of 11–14 years) of how pointless all discoveries and inventions are bound to be in the absence of ethical man capable of making use of them. And then, for pupils in higher grades, Prometheus' deed and punishment illustrating what happens when power is acquired in defiance of higher authority, and the expiation of this sin.

In astronomy the possibility of establishing a connection could be as follows: When examining the discoveries of Copernicus, to see them as a profound distrust of all appearances, the kind of wholesome distrust one should maintain when assessing one's own moral conduct. The humility which in the study of astronomy is bound to follow from the recognition of one's own limitations, should also be aimed at in the recognition of one's own imperfect moral conduct.

The study of languages can be based on the fact that it constitutes the first practical step toward a love of humanity which expresses itself in the true realization of inner hospitality, in detachment from the narrowness of one's own feelings, and in entering an alien point of view, thus creating greater tolerance and humility. Without this experience, merely learning a language achieves but little. This can be seen in the irreconcilable differences that exist within a community speaking the same language, as for example between different social classes, or between different generations. In this sense it is also necessary for everyone to study the language of his fellow countrymen.

In the ordinary teaching of history, both ethics and history are often abused. The usual attempts to present history as proof of the statement "History is the final judge" are both wrong and dangerous. Instead, one should abandon this type of historical reasoning, impossible in itself, and confine oneself to the psychological presentation of the ravages caused by violence in the soul of both the perpetrator and the ravaged. This is the only way to reduce to impotence the dazzling glare of historical events. (In any case read aloud "The End Justifies the Means" and page 66, paragraph 2, for a typical example of Foerster's reasoning.) The fundamental ethical error of trying to achieve freedom by the often tempting means of violence is illustrated by Christ's example.

Alas, it is too late to continue. I have reached approximately page 71, so all that remains is art and literature, the study of music being confined to examples such as the excellent "The Second Voice,"[58] which will, at least in part, have to be read aloud. In conclusion it might be pointed out that one should on no account allow oneself to be diverted from the book's main teaching (formulated once again on page 68, beginning of the last paragraph) by the inevitably unconnected examples, of which there are many more in the practical section (to which one's attention is drawn on many occasions). Needless to say, they all have but one purpose: to establish the main teaching more firmly.

Franz

Don’t take on too much work, Felice! Why, for instance, do you have to write the Report?[59]

September 26, 1916

Dearest, no news either yesterday or today.—To begin with, a few questions to be answered briefly: How many evenings a week do you now spend at the Home, and how many hours? How far away is the Home and how do you get there? What is Dr. Lehmann’s lecture on religious education chiefly concerned with? You say the girls choose their own helpers. How do they have the opportunity to make a choice? After all, you weren’t chosen, or were you appointed on trial? And why is Miriam no longer in charge? Do you know her personally? And what has happened to the second lady who applied for the job? She’s probably the one you called Rotstein. You divide the work between yourselves, and in what way? Your friends, your sisters, and your mother, who has been robbed of two Sundays now what is their attitude to the Home? Why did you take on the typing of the Annual Report, no doubt a task that someone else could have performed, and which will mean a huge additional burden for you even if the report were to be only one page? (To some extent this question is self-interested, for that page might have been far better spent on me.) Is your chief in Berlin? Have you an assistant, and how is she doing? Why did you have to move yet again? No further attempts to find an apartment since that one failure? Has there been any news of Herr Danziger? Have you heard from Feigl, or written to him? Have you heard from your sister? (I haven’t)—Enough questions for today.

Yesterday I got them to send you 10 copies of the *Weltliteratur* “Schlemihl” on good-quality paper on which I hope the illustrations will look better. By the way, I don’t even know this issue. In addition you will receive 2 copies of “Schlemihl” from Schaffstein.[60] These little books are probably more attractive than those from the *Weltliteratur*, chiefly on account of the original illustrations, but I don’t think they contain the full text. In my opinion the girls, instead of following the story in their own copies, should be given

the booklets by you as a keepsake, after completing “Schlemihl.” The choice is a good one to start off with, for the story’s wide range of interest alone. Unfortunately I cannot even begin to imagine either the needs or the abilities of these fortunate n-to-14-year-olds. Incidentally, have you noticed that Foerster, to begin with at least, pays no particular attention to the education of girls? This gives you the opportunity to supplement according to your own experience. I have not really had a chance as yet to talk to Max about reading matter for your particular group; I am afraid that for this age he won’t have many suggestions, either. The only thing I can suggest offhand would be *Stories from the Bible* (or some such title) by Sholem Asch.[61] I don’t know them, and the short pieces of his I have read I have thought pretty unbearable, but this particular book is supposed to be rather good. I shall have it sent to you before long. I also think one day you might try them with that little book by Lichtwark[62]: *Exercises in the Contemplation of Pictures* (or some such title), a book with a value akin to Foerster’s—excellent in its way, but beyond that open to doubt. I will have this sent to you as well.

When I advised against too much work at the Home (and what you have undertaken seems too much already), I was not thinking of the most obvious pitfall—namely, that she who leaps into the water too eagerly will be equally eager to leap out. I am sure you wouldn’t do that. It is merely the fear of your overworking, and that owing to the multiplicity of your efforts their intensity is bound to diminish. Please give me your views on this.

Starting and concluding the class with a song is very good in my opinion, but I don’t know why you yourself should refuse to sing. In Karlsbad you sang rather well; I mean you were fairly at ease, while I, at the same time, was plagued by nightmares in broad daylight. Which songs have been chosen?

As far as exercises are concerned, I would like to remind you of Müller’s method. You’ve got the book? But I must point out that these exercises cannot be improvised; they have to be studied, have to be studied beforehand.

I may be giving a reading in Munich after all. The fact that you will come (as you see, it has taken me no time to make your

conditional acceptance unconditional) acts as a strong incentive. But it won't be until November. A detour via Berlin is impossible for several reasons, and as far as I am concerned not very desirable. I would rather see you in Munich than in Berlin, though I regret the effort the journey will impose on you, and the Home too I would rather see through your eyes than in reality. Put this down to my present frame of mind, and perhaps also to my character.

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, September 27, 1916]

September 26, 1916

Dearest, no news the day before yesterday, yesterday, or today; rather a long time, isn't it? Though I do understand it: on Saturday and Sunday you simply hadn't the time. But today is a bad day anyway. Though yesterday was all the better; the weather was lovely and I went on an excursion all by myself to that plateau with the wide panoramic view I told you about once before. It was like being in the brighter Beyond. By the way, do you know the joys of being alone, walking alone, lying in the sun alone? Which doesn't mean I have anything against doing things in twos, and not much against doing them in threes. But what a joy it is for the tormented, for heart and head! Do you know what I mean? Have you ever walked a long way by yourself? The ability to enjoy it presupposes a great deal of past misery as well as past joys. As a boy I was alone a lot, but it was more from force of circumstance, rarely from choice. Now, however, I rush toward being alone as rivers rush toward the sea.

Kind regards, Franz

I have now spoken to Max; the only book he could suggest off hand was one by Sholom Aleichem.[63] But to me—and to him too in the end—it seems too sarcastic and complicated for

children. Instead, I will send you a suitable puzzle book, and an occupational book as well, that is if I can find it.

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 28, 1916

Dearest, your Saturday letter arrived today, not so your good wishes. In these circumstances it is unlikely that my précis will have arrived on time, but as a matter of fact you must have made a mistake: that evening surely won't be held on New Year's Day. What makes me most impatient is that your evening for the children took place a long time ago, and yet it may be ages before I get any news. I know Schreiber,[64] of course, and though I have met him only once or twice, I have always had a liking for him. A man constantly lost, yet constantly able to extricate himself again. Unhappily married as well, I believe. Do give him my kindest regards. The Home is turning into a fine meeting place, quite apart from its main purpose. I am delighted to commit you to the care of these people.

Franz

September 29, 1916

Dearest, today I imagined I was going to have an exceptionally peaceful time; Foerster is lying beside me; I meant to write the remainder of the précis, perhaps improve the whole thing, but it isn't possible, things here are more lively than usual. I shall be thankful if I am allowed to finish a few lines. Your Tuesday letter arrived today. These letters of yours create a stronger and deeper bond between us than did the best letters from the best of the old days. My only regret is that my replies are so very cursory and vague—even vaguer than my character would warrant. It is the typewriter that leads me astray and makes me vague and voluble, while it permits you to express yourself more clearly than usual. Well, one of these days I expect the imperative reason for using the typewriter will also disappear. The thought that any piece of news could be lost is another thing that makes me nervous. You make a

point of telling me, for instance, that you didn't write last Monday on account of Sophie. But there is also no Sunday letter from you, so, though I can hardly imagine it, there might possibly have been some news in a Sunday letter about Saturday evening, your first evening with the girls, which you fail to mention on Tuesday; but again in that letter there is no word of the proposed Sunday excursion. Once I know for certain that a letter has been lost, I am able to resign myself to the fact, but the uncertainty upsets me. So do give me the chance to understand. Incidentally, did you get my cursory reply to your religious questions? That was an immense subject Lemm[65] took upon himself, almost too big to be covered even in the most beautiful apartment in Friedenau. Who made up the audience? Could you tell me something about the lecture, the discussion, and perhaps also about Dr. Lehmann's past lecture on religious education, in just a few words? I know Lemm, of course, from his occasional articles. His ideas are fanciful to the point of eccentricity (I wonder if you have heard of his theory of the middle land?), but he is honest, consistent, and very versatile. At least he appears so to me. How old is he? Who did you talk to on that occasion?

Having to take over the reading of *Minna von Barnhelm*[66] is an arduous legacy indeed. Are girls as young as that actually able to grasp complicated drama? Provided they had not progressed too far with their reading, and even if they had, would it not be possible, with some suitable explanation, to curtail the reading of the play? Unless your predecessor—surely not Miriam—had succeeded in awakening in them a true feeling for the play. To me, however, this would be an unimaginable feat. But if these girls have started tackling drama, then Asch's book may be too childish for them (though this might not necessarily be a mistake), for in this case their minds ought to be ready to read the Bible itself, even though I personally would advise against it. At any rate in order to widen your choice of suitable books, I will get them to send you Peretz's *Popular Tales.*[67]

I don't understand the term comradeship in the curriculum. Do those Wednesday classes differ from the reading and drama classes

on Saturday? And how is it that your classes start at 6 on Wednesday, and even as early as 5 on Saturday? Can you be there at that time, above all on Saturday, payday? A very good thing that Frl. Bloch has also found a means of taking part.

Yesterday 2 of Feigl's paintings arrived, among them the very one I wanted without being able to describe it from memory.

The letter with your good wishes arrived today. The gift of flowers is not in keeping with my family circumstances; if I'd had to buy the flowers, I would have had to destroy myself first. Surely you wouldn't want that. And in that case the flowers would never have been bought at all. In any event I bless the New Year for having provided you, perhaps, with two peaceful days.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September 30, 1916

Dearest, no news today. We must come to some arrangement about the trip to Munich. The date has not been decided, merely that it will be in November. Nor, of course, is my trip absolutely certain yet. I would have only 2 days in all, singularly little time, especially since the trains to Munich are very bad; it takes all day, and I would have to read that same evening, and then leave again the following morning. Unless a Sunday or a holiday could be added, in which case—and this would be the only really desirable thing about the entire trip—we could have a day to ourselves. In your New Year letter you mention the possibility of coming to Prague. Are you serious, and do you see a possibility? Once again I have to admit, though—you won't take it amiss—I would prefer to see you, say, in Bodenbach, rather than here; however, and this too is true, rather here than not at all. What had you in mind?

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 1, 1916

Dearest, nothing again today. Rotten, rotten night, partly your doing —dream doing. The following nightmare: a telephone call from the porter's lodge at the Institute to say there is a letter for me. I rush down. Find no porter there, but instead the head of the department to which all incoming mail is invariably delivered first. Ask for the letter. The man examines the little table upon which the letter was supposed to have been lying only a moment ago, but cannot find it, blames the porter who, without authority, had taken the letter off the mailman instead of allowing it to be handed to the appropriate department. In any case, I now have to wait for the porter, a long wait. Finally he arrives. A giant both in size and in stupidity. He doesn't know where the letter can be. In desperation, I decide to lodge a complaint with the director, I shall demand a confrontation between the mailman and the porter at which the latter is to give an undertaking never again to accept letters. Half out of my mind, I wander along corridors and up and down stairs, searching in vain for the director.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 2, 1916

Dearest, some news at last, your letter of the 29th.—I knew in advance the way you would use the second *Jugendlehre*, and of course it is the right way. But you can safely take the book apart, write your comments as they arise while reflecting and teaching on pages the size of the book, insert them in the appropriate places, and then we can have the book bound to include these pages. Just think what a lovely book it would be! (I very nearly said: Just think of it.[68]) How about sending me the notes you are making for the lecture?—Even here, far away, I can feel the Home's peculiar quality you mention, its power to dominate one's life.—Sometime you might tell me a little more about the principal. Needless to say, a little snapshot taken on one of your outings, or gatherings, or

anywhere, would be most enlightening.—The Sholem Asch book I had sent to you is too childish rather than too difficult. But why not begin with Chamisso? *But never, never with Wildenbruch;*[69] *nor is the predicament so great as to force one to resort to Rossegger.*[70] Hebel[71] would be very good now and then. Have you got it?—The reading—if it comes off at all—will be on Friday, November 10th; Saturday we could have to ourselves. Decide!

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 3, 1916

Dearest, again nothing; I do receive harsh treatment. So the Home is near the Alexanderplatz[72] (of numerous unhappy memories). Not many times, though often enough, I have hurried, blundered, wandered across it. The telephone conversations, or rather telephone monologues, carried on by the wretched prisoner in the telephone booth at the Askanische Hof come to mind: No, I won't repeat them after all. This was the kind of baggage that was gladly cast into the stream of time; it is useful nevertheless when that ever-twisting stream comes close again to take up things of the past once more. But one can hardly afford it with the kind of headaches I have been carrying around these last few days after a brief but comparatively peaceful interval.—The reproach in the first line merely slipped out of my unreasonable typewriter; my more reasonable pen declares itself satisfied with one letter a week, and moreover counts every visit to the Home as equivalent to a letter.—Have you got Hirsch's *Letters*?[73] I believe German Jews consider the book one of the orthodox standard works; I don't know it at all. Which edition?——

Kind regards, Franz

Max asks me to thank you, and shares my pleasure (though a different kind of pleasure) at your working at the Home.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 4, 1916

Dearest, again nothing, I had better stop emphasizing it, by now it's almost a foregone conclusion.——

That was my morning thought, for later your Sunday letter did arrive. Personally, that is, in the more deeply personal sense, I am wholly against being insatiable, and yet it keeps creeping in again, especially after wretched nights when one has lost almost all vestige of self-control. Don't let it worry you.

You say we could spend far more time together in Berlin than in Munich. I don't see why, and anyway it isn't true. In Munich, provided the reading comes off and you can spare the time, we could have Saturday, November 11th, entirely to ourselves; no such thing would be possible in Berlin.—Today I had a letter from your sister. Needless to say, she doesn't want to leave, is relatively contented, and just as you once asked me to warn her of the danger, she now asks me to dispel your fears. Incidentally, I was surprised that once the first excitement was over, you never mentioned the subject again, although I referred to it several times. I still believe it is best for her to stay there for the time being.

Franz

October 5, 1916

Dearest, at the typewriter at last, but with a bad head; the laws by which my blood rages within me are inscrutable; for some days now my whole nervous system has been in turmoil again, and not a moment's sleep is granted me. Last night I went to see Dr. Bergmann, who is on holiday here; he was at school with me; I like him and wanted to see him again. Do you know the name, by the way? It plays an important part in Zionism. Hugo Bergmann.[74] What I meant to tell you here is that I sat there last night with my aching

head, feeling like a condemned man. And yet lately, for a short while, I was quite well. No, work is out of the question for me in my present condition. But I especially regret that as a result I am unable by letter to give you the support in your work that I meant to, and would have been happy to give. You thank me, yet I want to do infinitely more than that; after all, what I actually accomplish is nothing, and pitiful.

Another symptom of my head: I ask about Danziger and mean Steinitz. But anyway the thing itself, at least, has turned out quite well.

Only yesterday I discovered that the better edition of the *Weltliteratur* issue of "Schlemihl" is no longer obtainable, but the ordinary edition is probably not good enough to give the children as a present. In any case I will have only 5 copies of it sent to you, and moreover will look at the Insel edition[75] to see if that might be suitable. But before I do, I would like to know how many girls you actually have.

Your comments in praise of the exhibition[76] may have been written on the very day I wrote one of my recent postcards in praise of being alone. I merely wish to add that these 2 elements don't have to fight each other; on the contrary, they could very well build up a life together. As for the exhibition, it may indeed be very beautiful, but certainly not complete. What it lacks is a Chamber of Horrors, the principal exhibit of which would have to be a group as depicted, for example, by a cousin of mine, with her husband and the baby carriage. A good girl, in fact exceptionally intelligent, who somehow, with advancing years and constant poverty, became confused. Helpless, she was determined to get married, and married —admittedly with the approval of all her variously informed relatives—a man she would certainly never have married had she been in a calmer frame of mind. Personally I have nothing against him; in the brief moments I have been with him he always seemed very entertaining and funny, but not funny in a way that would make one feel a fool if one happened to be his wife. His humor is by no means generally appreciated. If I were to attempt to describe him in detail it would become too protracted and, in view of the amount

of interest he has held for me up to now, untruthful. At any rate his looks are passable, too healthy rather than ill, permanently very contented, and hardly any older than his wife. And then there is the child. It is exceptionally strong, about 2 years old; with white innocent flesh, luxuriant fair hair, clear blue eyes, it resembles both father and mother, but is more attractive than either. But it is quite listless; it lies in its carriage, large and motionless, its eyes roving about aimlessly and apathetically. It can't even sit up, the mouth can't smile, and nothing can induce it to utter a word. When the parents are out walking one on either side of the nursemaid and the carriage, and against their will are stopped by some acquaintance (me, for example), and the mother—saddled with that father and that child—stands there with tears in her eyes, glancing first at the acquaintance, then at the child, yet manages a smile so as not to leave her permanently contented husband all alone with his laughter—well, this too should form part of that exhibition.

But let's forget it; with kindest regards,

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 6, 1916

Dearest, yesterday your Monday and today your Wednesday letter arrived; after the latter's conclusion, perhaps the door leading into the girls' room will open and you will be accompanied by my most ardent good wishes.—Today I was again reminded of our *Erdmuthe*, because the university library has asked for the book to be returned. *Erdmuthe* should also be part of that exhibition, though in a place far removed from my cousin. She in any case had 12 children, perhaps more, but they all died very young; only one, I believe, reached the age of twenty, but died soon after. And quite apart from this brood she was in charge of the entire financial side (an almost superhuman task in view of her husband's and the Brethren's situation) and to some extent of the spiritual side of the Moravian Church, at that time rapidly spreading across the whole of Europe and North

America. Died at the age of 56. Soon after her death her husband married a girl with whom he had shared a deep spiritual bond for a long time.—Today I sent you "Schlemihl" in the Insel edition. Unfortunately there is something wrong with every edition. It seems that Schaffstein's is incomplete, *Weltliteratur*'s too shabby, Insel's print too small, and Fischer's too expensive. There are other good editions, but without illustrations. So choose, and tell me what more you need. Later on, if you like, I will send you Buber's letter.[77]—Kind regards, dearest and best one.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 7, 1916

Dearest, nothing today; the best of all—your report of the first meeting at the Home—will of course take its time, it won't come in a hurry. By freely giving the girls these rights (if I have understood you correctly), the situation may be made unnecessarily delicate, inviting criticism from those who are already over-critical. Surely the same, and more, could be achieved by simply letting them vote, without actually granting them the right to do so. But perhaps this is just what's happening, and I may simply have misunderstood you.—As for the Report, what annoyed me is the fact that it is merely a matter of copying. Copyists, after all, cannot be hard to find. But perhaps one could not very well refuse. From a distance it is easy to be severe.—Max's article "Our Writers and the Community" may appear in the next issue of *Der Jude*.[78] And incidentally, won't you tell me what I really am: in the last *Neue Rundschau*, *Metamorphosis* is mentioned and rejected on sensible grounds, and then says the writer: "There is something fundamentally German about K's narrative art." In Max's article on the other hand: "K's stories are among the most typically Jewish documents of our time."[79]

A difficult case. Am I a circus rider on 2 horses? Alas, I am no rider, but lie prostrate on the ground.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 8, 1916

Dearest, I am very pleased today: the letter, the postcard, and Thursday's photographs arrived. One's latest acquisitions are easily overestimated, but I really don't think I have a better picture of you than this one with the children on your left and the (carriage?) window behind you. You may be rather too dark (perhaps your camera is not being handled properly?), but on the other hand more purposeful, if you see what I mean, than in any other picture. There is another of the same group, though without you, and I suppose the girl with the bow appearing in your place was the one who took the first picture. Are you in Frl. Welkanoz's group as well? If I am not mistaken her face is delicate, with small features, but distinguished by its clear contours. Sabinchen reminds me of a flower-girl, older, though very much like her, whom Ottla has been teaching German for some time.—Please, please more about that first meeting.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] I have been writing daily for a long time now.

*Franz Kafka's mother to Felice Bauer*

Prague, October 8, 1916

My dear daughter,

Many thanks for your kind letter with your good wishes which we reciprocate most sincerely, if somewhat belatedly. We were very busy in the shop before the holidays, which is why I was prevented from writing sooner.

We observed the Jewish holidays like good Jews. Over the New Year our business was closed for the 2 days, and yesterday, the Day of Atonement, we fasted and prayed a great deal. Fasting was no trouble since we have been in training for it all year.

The food shortage, by the way, is so far not too bad here in Prague, and we would be very glad to welcome you here in the near

future. Perhaps it would be possible for you to take a few days off.

We have good news, thank God, from both Karl and Peppo. Eight weeks ago Peppo had two weeks' leave, and Karl is hoping to get some leave before long. We hope to see you very soon, and while Father joins me in sending his kindest regards, I embrace you affectionately,

your devoted mother, Julie Kafka

All our children send their kindest regards.

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 9, 1916

Dearest, nothing today, but remember it is essential that I have the conclusion of the report on the first meeting at the Home. Horrid Hertha may be your main problem to begin with. There must be some good reason for her behavior. Your instructions to the girls can hardly have been sufficient, since the girls evidently don't like talking to her. Wouldn't it be a good idea to write to her direct? On the other hand, the other girl's behavior toward the end of the evening is less incomprehensible to me; I can imagine acting in the same way myself. I had already approved of your bringing *Minna von Barnhelm* to a premature conclusion. It was certainly the best thing to do. Children should not be pushed into things that to them must seem quite incomprehensible. At the same time one should bear in mind that even this can occasionally produce excellent results; the trouble is, they are completely unpredictable. It reminds me of a professor who, when reading the *Iliad*, used to say: "It's a great pity that one is obliged to read this with you. You couldn't possibly understand it; even if you think you do, you don't. One has to have experienced a great deal before one can understand even a few lines." At the time these remarks (as a matter of fact this was the tone the man invariably adopted) made a far greater impression on me, callous youth, than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined. Too crushing perhaps, yet a strong impression all the same.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 10, 1916

Dearest, nothing again today, sad. I still haven't heard everything about that first meeting at the Home, nothing about your report, nothing about your Sunday. Did you spend last Sunday with the children, or the one before? If it was last Sunday, then you probably got soaked in the great downpour ("nothing remains hidden from him"), while we, Ottla and I, in an attempt to avoid the rain (here merely a threat), followed a zigzag course, unlike our usual summer walks—entirely at my instigation, since Ottla of course has no fear of rain. Nor, for that matter, have I, provided there is a veranda somewhere near the mudbaths, and under it a seat, and on the seat you.—With regard to Munich, so as to be prepared in advance: When would you arrive? In which hotel will you be staying? When would you have to leave? If it can be arranged, I would read a story as yet unknown to you. It is called "In the Penal Colony."—Yesterday I sent you a handbook on outdoor games for girls; it may be useful to you, it seems rather sensible. Before long I will send you something else of the same kind.—For your reading with the children (apart from "Schlemihl," with which you should start) I suggest you bear in mind: Hebel, Tolstoy's *Popular Tales*, Andersen's "Galoshes of Fortune." Choose, and I will send it.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 11, 1916

Dearest, Saturday's and Sunday's letters arrived today, and then later, that of Monday.—Am I responsible for upsetting you? If so, please don't hold it against me. I have so little self-control, and that little is the utmost I can muster. Again: forgive me!—On the other hand I cannot ask forgiveness for my failure to send greetings, although I realize that your mother was bound to shake her head, and no doubt do more than that. At best, and with the utmost effort,

I might be able just to *see* beyond the limits of my character, but *go* beyond them I cannot. There is no need for you to understand this, nor will you be able to sympathize with it; you should merely be aware of it. Your mother of course need not, cannot, and should not do any of these things. In this I am bound, from direst necessity, bound to fail. And I am sorry, yet not sorry enough to wish I could free myself of this inhibition, which in any case I am incapable of removing. As a matter of fact at home I said hardly a word about the New Year, and to you nothing, quite in accordance with the lack of significance I attach to this day. Anything else would be a lie, and one that in its own particular way would have many ramifications for me. Actually, I have an excuse so far as your mother is concerned, though admittedly a very superficial one. She never answered my letter from Marienbad, but on no account should that be held against her, for even if she had replied, I still would not have sent her New Year greetings.—Dearest, accept me as I am.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] September [October] 12, 1916

Dearest, that's better, even though impossible in the long run: your Tuesday letter arrived today.—If only my journey were as definite by now as happily yours seems to be, but there are still tiresome obstacles in plenty, and things are far from settled. Besides, the train connection, with Munich in particular, is rather bad. I leave, I think, about 8 A.M. (the only train) and don't arrive until 6:24 P.M., thus not until Friday evening. I am not sure yet about the return journey, but am afraid I shall have to leave by 7 A.M. on Sunday, there is no night train, and I dare not ask for more than 2 days. We can discuss the Christmas trip, I have no wish for us to hide from anyone, I fear no one except my parents; but them, enormously. To sit at my parents' dinner table with you (I mean now, later on it may become quite easy) would be sheer torture for me. Yet even moments such as these would be insignificant compared to the joy of showing you

Prague, you alone, and more thoroughly, more carefully, more seriously than ever before.—Bad news from the Home, about this later. By the way, am I not musical? The sentence “I feel very much at ease among the children, much more at home, in fact, than at the office” sounds in my ears like the most admirable music. How does Frl. Bloch get on with them?

As yet I know nothing about the University Extension; I once asked you for more specific information; you haven’t sent it.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] I still haven’t received the Annual Report.

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 13, 1916

Dearest, no news today, nor has the Annual Report arrived. Now that you give me the reason, of course I approve of your typing it, but in that case, to be wholly consistent, one would really have to copy the whole of Foerster, or—eternal and at present quite inappropriate scourge!—the *Memoirs*[80] as well, if it were true that inspired reading could be achieved only by harnessing oneself to the typewriter. Actually for me, in my alas only too frequent bad spells, even that would be too ineffective. But there should be a means of injecting some life into the Foerster course, of which you say such disappointed and disappointing things. In these circumstances, at any rate, one is forced more than ever to read the whole of Foerster, quite apart from the section assigned to one. And however bad the course, surely it cannot vitiate the benefits derived from reading Foerster on one’s own. I wish I had the permanent tranquility of mind to discuss with you by letter the whole of Foerster, chapter by chapter! For he is important; of this there is no doubt.—Today I am sending you a puzzle book, I wish it contained more, but in the hands of their lively grown-up friend it is sure to amuse the girls.—How will it be without Lehmann, Lemm, and possibly without

Welkanoz? At the moment all good things seem condemned to remain in an excruciating state of suspense, and among the good things I include our union.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 14, 1916

Dearest, your postcard and the Report arrived today. Oh, the personal significance these pages have for me! I must say, it cannot have been an easy task for you. So far I have only glanced at it, but consider it most informative and sensible. Only when discussing the younger boys' groups does it become a little fanciful. But this is pardonable, especially in a first report. In my opinion, what it lacks is sufficient consideration for the organizers and helpers; Zionism and sweeping enthusiasm are not enough. But even these misgivings are apologetically referred to in the remark that after the war the association between the helpers and those in their care should become a much closer one. In this respect it is no doubt still far from perfect, and your complaint, which I should like to know in detail, does after all confirm the fact. One is aware, moreover, that the development of the girls' group is not yet up to that of the boys'. But above all, and continuously, there is some arrogance in the Report. However, provided one doesn't stop working, time will eradicate this.—Am I not bothering you by sending books? Am I not depriving you of time assigned to reading Foerster? What, incidentally, gives you the right to think I didn't finish reading *Erdmuthe* long ago? Except for the footnotes, which are not essential, I read the whole book in Marienbad. Atone for this unjustified reproach by promptly sending snapshots of your outing.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 15, 1916

Dearest, such a lovely day, and here am I in the office. My consolation is that you are at Mühlenbeck.—Again no news today. You often say you have had no news, but fail to mention whether the missing news has reached you the following day. It must have, for I write every day.—I was forced to lend Max the Report before reading it a second time; he needs it for the girls' club—that delicate, brittle, yet by no means worthless organization.[81] Your complaint that they take everything personally is in effect the very motto of this club. What struck me about the Report was the excellence of the section dealing with the older boys; this was by Lehmann, evidently. It consists of a number of facts and results, whereas the rest consists largely of things one could have taken for granted anyway, though in a first report they are not out of place. The kindergarten, incidentally, about which they write so modestly, seems to be excellent.—I am alone today, Ottla has gone to the country, I have the choice of either going to pick up Felix and his wife, which I have agreed to do, or of going for a walk alone. Which shall it be?

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 16, [1916]

Dearest, irritating day, tempered by your letter of the 13th.—In case you didn't guess right yesterday, I was alone. Walked a very long way, roughly 5 hours, alone yet not alone enough, in deserted valleys, yet not deserted enough. At times I am conscious of my worries, as if they were draining the blood from my temples.—The Sabinchen affair is a delicate one indeed. But I cannot quite understand the circumstances leading up to it. What is the cashbox normally meant for? Did S. borrow the 2 marks, and not tell the others until afterwards? Who decides what the money in the cashbox is to be used for? Where does the money come from originally? Didn't the former principal know about the affair? Needless to say I do not doubt Sabinchen's honesty and need of

help; but if the formalities for borrowing were not complied with, then one surely has to consider that the other girls might be as honest and as much in need of help, and feel themselves at a disadvantage merely by not being placed so near the cashbox. Whatever happens, this affair should not be the cause of S. losing her place of honor. But the whole thing could never have happened if they all trusted each other, and I can see there is a lot of work for you to do. I dare say the first thing to do is to see Sabinchen and Hertha.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 17, 1916

Dearest, wonder of wonders, although it still isn't definite, it does seem quite likely that I shall be able to go. After removing all predictable obstacles, may this venture not be made impossible by unpredictable ones. It is not out of the question, by the way, that the reading will be postponed from November 10th to the 17th. The decision will be made in the course of the next week. Should it be on the 10th, you will have to forego Milan's reading[82] for my sake; I think it is on November 9th in the Choralion Hall; but if it's not on the 10th you must go to the Choralion Hall, for my sake. The selection (Ebner-Eschenbach,[83] Keller,[84] Storm[85]) may not be the one to show him at his best; with the exception of Keller, it may be compared to his reading of a story by Jacobsen[86] which I heard, and which was his weakest (only relatively of course); nevertheless, Felice, you must go and hear it.—I very much approve of your reading "The Galoshes of Fortune" to them; you can also read a lot more of Andersen, but never sections that you don't intend to finish the next time. When reading *Minna von Barnhelm* the children failed (and rightly so) to get an impression of the whole, but this should not happen again.—I received no news today.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 18, [1916]

Dearest, my poor excess-postage payer, forgive me, but I am almost entirely innocent, of which I could easily convince you with a very detailed description, but from this you will surely excuse me; even Max, the post office official,[87] has so far sent nothing but these postcards. Your Saturday letter arrived today, later in the day Monday's. The latter in particular was very comforting. Yesterday the mail van carrying the afternoon's Berlin mail was burned out, and today I went around all morning very pensive and in a haze, continually worrying about the burned-out van in which it is highly probable that your Monday letter with your description of the outing perished in the flames. Only later did your letter arrive; so it wasn't burned, after all.—Max cannot get a permit to go to Munich. During the first part of the evening, which may take place after all, I may be reading some of his poetry. Am not a very good, in fact a very bad reader of poetry, but if no one better can be found, I shall be glad to do it. But I must say at once: If you cannot come, I would prefer not to go, either. By now I have got too used to the idea of seeing you there. No doubt after October 22nd, by which date your chief will have returned from his vacation, you will know for certain whether or not the trip is likely to be possible.

Franz

September [presumably October[88]] 19, 1916

Dearest, for me to accept the things you say about Mother, parents, flowers, the New Year, and the company at table is not as simple as all that. You say that for you, too, to have to sit at table in my home with all my family won't "rank among your pleasantest experiences." Here you are merely expressing your opinion, and rightly so, regardless of whether I like it or not. Well, I don't like it. But I should certainly like it a great deal less had you said the opposite. Please tell me as plainly as possible what you think will make it unpleasant for you, and where the cause of this

unpleasantness lies. We have often discussed this subject from my point of view, but in these matters it's hard to grasp even a little of the truth. One just has to keep on trying. Roughly—hence with rather more ruthlessness than the truth would warrant—I can describe my position as follows: Having as a rule depended on others, I have an infinite longing for independence, self-reliance, freedom in all directions; I would rather wear blinkers and go my own way to the bitter end, than have my vision distorted by being in the midst of frenzied family life. That's why every word I say to my parents, or they to me, so easily turns into a stumbling block under my feet. Any relationship not created by myself, even though it be opposed to parts of my own nature, is worthless; it hinders my movements, I hate it, or come near to hating it. The road is long, one's resources few, there is reason in plenty for this hatred. Yet, I am my parents' progeny, am bound to them and to my sisters by blood; in my daily life, and because of the necessary obsession with my particular objectives, I am not conscious of this, yet fundamentally I respect it more than I know. Sometimes this too becomes the object of my hatred; at home the sight of the double bed, of sheets that have been slept in, of nightshirts carefully laid out, can bring me to the point of retching, can turn my stomach inside out; it is as though my birth had not been final, as though from this fusty life I keep being born again and again in this fusty room; as though I had to return there for confirmation, being—if not quite, at least in part—indissolubly connected with these distasteful things; something still clings to the feet as they try to break free, held fast as they are in the primeval slime. That is sometimes. At other times I know that after all they are my parents, are essential, strength-giving elements of my own self, belonging to me, not merely as obstacles but as human beings. At such times I want them as one wants perfection; since from way back and despite all my nastiness, rudeness, selfishness, and unkindness I have always trembled before them—and do so to this day, for in fact one never stops; and since they, Father on the one hand and Mother on the other, have—again quite naturally—almost broken my will, I want them to be worthy of their actions. (Now and again I think that

Ottla would be the kind of mother I should like in the background: pure, truthful, honest, consistent—with humility and pride, receptiveness and reticence, devotion and self-reliance, timidity and courage, in unerring equilibrium. I mention Ottla because my mother after all is also part of her, though altogether unrecognizable.) So I want them to be worthy of their actions. In consequence, for me, they are a hundred times more unclean than they may be in reality, which doesn't really worry me; their foolishness is a hundred times greater, their absurdity a hundred times greater, their coarseness a hundred times greater. On the other hand their good qualities seem a hundred thousand times smaller than they are in reality. Thus they deceive me, and yet I cannot rebel against the laws of nature without going mad. So again there is hatred, and almost nothing but hatred. But you belong to me, I have made you mine; I do not believe that the battle for any woman in any fairy tale has been fought harder and more desperately than the battle for you within myself—from the beginning, over and over again, and perhaps forever. So you belong to me. Therefore my relationship with your relatives is not unlike my relationship with my own, albeit far less intense, of course, in regard to their good as well as their bad qualities. They too constitute a bond which hampers me (hampers me, even if we were never to exchange a word), and in the above-mentioned sense they are not worthy. In saying this I am being as frank with you as I am with myself. You mustn't hold it against me, nor see any arrogance in it; there is none, at least not where you would expect to find it. Suppose you were now in Prague, sitting at my parents' table, the area of conflict, which is what I fight against in my parents, would naturally have grown greater. They would assume that my bond with the family as a whole had grown greater (but it hasn't, and mustn't), and they would make me feel it: they would think of me as having joined their ranks, one outpost of which is the bedroom next door (but I have not joined); they would think that in you they had gained an ally against my opposition (they have not gained one), and in my eyes all that is ugly and contemptible about them is intensified, since I would expect them to rise to this greater

occasion. Yet if this is so, why did I not like what you said? Because, literally, I stand facing my family perpetually brandishing knives, simultaneously to wound and to defend them. Leave me to act on your behalf in this matter, without acting on my behalf so far as your family is concerned. Isn't this too great a sacrifice for you to make, dearest? It is immense, and will only be made easier for you since, being what I am, should you fail to make it, I shall be forced to wrest it from you. But if you do make it, you will have done a lot for me.

I won't write to you for a day or two, deliberately, so that you can consider it and reply to it, undisturbed by me. My confidence in you is such that a single word would serve as a reply.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 21, 1916

Dearest, so here I am once again. The day before yesterday and yesterday I got your letters of Tuesday and Wednesday, but the description of the outing was not among them. Perhaps it will arrive at the same time as the eagerly awaited photographs, among which I hope there may be a great many of you. (Just now I had to rush to the telephone where I was notified that my passport and the permit for crossing the frontier have been granted; all that's needed now is the visa.) You ask me about Frau Hauschner.[89] I don't know her personally, but did once read a not altogether unreasonable and enormously voluminous novel by her, and more recently two or three letters to Max which were immensely funny owing to some muddle the old lady had caused, but also touching and pleasant because of the way in which she genuinely attempted to disentangle it. In addition I have now heard from Max that she is also extraordinarily rich, humanitarian, and philanthropic; from this point of view (from no other, she is by no means pro-Zionist) she is also interested in the Home, and might on some suitable occasion, perhaps by invitation to a typical afternoon or evening at the Home,

be persuaded to make substantial contributions (she is also president of a large women's organization in Berlin). Anyway, she is staying in Prague until early November; Max is going to talk to her on Tuesday, and then I will let you know.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 22, 1916, 7 o'clock

Dearest, quite improbably early in the morning, and moreover after a bad night. But I am going to the country with Ottla. Not to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, merely to see a former schoolteacher of hers. With regard to Ottla: I never intended to make an exalted example of her; I merely mentioned her good, partly excellent qualities as they strike one compared with her mother's. I never meant to conceal that at the same time she may well be rather complacent, intellectually calculating, and other things besides, although in view of my own position I have little right either to praise or to blame.

Kind regards, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 23, 1916

Dearest, your Thursday letter arrived today. In view of your frequent complaints about lack of news, I should be glad to know what you have actually received, since for a long time now, with the exception of last Friday, I have been writing daily.—As far as the old arrangement with Felix is concerned, you guessed right. Actually, it was not very difficult, considering how the question was put. And now you threaten me? Fortunately the thought of being comforted alarms me almost more than being threatened. Your threat, Felice, will be impossible to carry out, except with the help of a strait jacket. And surely you would not do that; instead, for

better or worse, you will leave me as I am. It was lovely in the country yesterday. Over the years I have secretly changed, without realizing it, from a city-dweller into a countryman, or something very like it. We went to a God-forsaken place—very rural, very beautiful—to see a schoolteacher who lives there, happy and contented, on about 600 kronen a year. To stick to the facts, she is a university student who teaches privately, has a temporary job at the school, earns a further 50 kronen a month by giving German lessons, and is lucky enough to be living rent-free for the first 6 months. She teaches 55 children, boys and girls of 10 and 11.—By the way, did the Insel "Schlemihl" and the puzzle book ever reach you?

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 24, 1916

Dearest, nothing again today.—In yesterday's letter the following passage gave me particular pleasure: "You are a man who sees himself so clearly that being alone is bound to make you more depressed than you are otherwise." By which you mean that being alone, or to be precise, calmly trying to see myself clearly (man's great privilege), acquiring insight into myself, is bound to depress me. So it looks pretty bad inside me! Is that what you meant? You would be right.—By the way, there is someone here who is my judge (in Marienbad I did just mention her remarks, according to which I am amoral).[90] Yesterday I heard of her again; a few days ago she is supposed to have said, firstly, that I am unnatural—that whatever I say is based not on impulse, but on the calculated considerations of the effect; and secondly that I am not a good man. The girl who said that is intelligent, and at first I really felt as though I were hearing something quite pertinent.—So all the girls went on the outing, Hanff included?—Has your chief's vacation been extended?—I still cannot give you a definite date for the reading. Renewed difficulties.—I got them to send you 4 little

songbooks published by Insel Verlag, very nice little books. As well as a Blauweiss[91] songbook.—You are taking a Fröbel[92] course instead of a course on religion?—What are the fairy-tale evenings like?—Who conducts the Foerster course?

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, October 25, 1916]

Dearest, your Saturday letter arrived today. So the girls do take you away from me to some extent. I would hold it against them if they didn't give you back to me a thousandfold. No more today, there are various urgent, nerve-racking jobs for me to do.

Franz

> Max had a word with Frau Hauschner yesterday and announced your visit. For the time being, she merely wants to contribute from afar, but if she is asked personally and cordially to one of your evenings, one may be able to enlist her support in other ways as well.

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 26, [1916]

Dearest, your letters of Monday and Tuesday arrived today. Once again, after a surprisingly long spell almost entirely free from headaches, they find me in a very bad state. Provided it is temporary I will gladly put up with it.—Nothing that normally constitutes an outing was omitted from yours; instead, a number of things not usually included in outings were added, and this may have been the reason for its success. No, you haven't told me anything about Fräulein Blumstein. However, the pictures will now make everything clear.—Well, the reading will take place on Friday, November 10th, at 8 o'clock; tomorrow I will write and tell you the exact time of my arrival in Munich; please let me know when you

are due to arrive, and where you will be staying. The program has now been definitely decided; but it still contains one small snag (nothing to do with me), though it may exist only in my own overanxious eyes and not turn into a major obstacle.—It really does seem too much that you should attend a regular course of lectures as well. And lectures on Strindberg at that! We are his contemporaries and his successors. One has only to close one's eyes and one's own blood delivers lectures on Strindberg. All the same, do drop me a line now and again about these lectures if you really do attend them.—I have not spoken to Frau Hauschner, she doesn't know me; but Max, who is much loved by her, has announced your visit.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 27, 1916

Dearest, thank you for Wednesday's kind words. Fundamentally I have little doubt that we are in agreement on this subject, and will continue to agree; even so, it may be a good thing from time to time to ring this bell, this bell at our door.—So the reading will now take place on November 10th. Max and I were supposed to have an evening each. But since Max's application for leave for these two days and for that purpose was turned down and he can't go, I have undertaken to read a number of his poems as well or as badly as I can. He should not be altogether absent from that series of readings; better to appear imperfectly delivered than not appear at all. The only thing that could conceivably prevent my reading now would be difficulties the Munich censorship might make—though I can't imagine what they could object to.—To attend Milan's reading on the eve of your departure would surely be overdoing it. First of all he gives several readings each winter; secondly, however great his talent, a good night's sleep is worth as much; and thirdly, you shouldn't come straight from his lecture—with extravagant expectations—to mine; that is, if you intend to come to it at all,

which still has to be considered. I arrive in Munich at 6:24, and leave again on Sunday at 7 o'clock.—The mailman happy now? But he did do me an injustice.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] Still reading Foerster?

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 28, 1916

Dearest, tormented again by nights and head, or head and nights, whichever you prefer; they join hands to torment me.—The other day I read *Ritual Murder in Hungary*, a tragedy by Zweig;[93] its supernatural scenes are as contrived and feeble as I would have expected from what I know of Zweig's work. The terrestrial scenes on the other hand are intensely alive, taken no doubt largely from the excellent records of the case. Nevertheless one cannot quite distinguish between the two worlds; he has identified himself with the case and is now under its spell. I no longer see him the way I used to. At one point I had to stop reading, sit down on the sofa, and weep. It's years since I wept.

Franz

[IN THE MARGIN] Won't we be on the same train for the last part of the journey?

I am traveling via Eger.

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, October 29, 1916]

Dearest, your Thursday letter arrived today. You are right, we simply have to meet and talk at last. If only the reading were certain to take place! I have no choice, other than that which I submitted, nor do I wish to read anything else. So I should have to decline if it

were not accepted by the authorities. And that is why I dread this possible difficulty, which otherwise would hardly be worth mentioning. It would be a very good thing if we were to join each other on the actual journey, very good for me, for in that case you would be dragged across, dragged down, to the third class.—I spoke to Feigl the other day; he has been called up. Since they have let their apartment and given the post office an incorrect forwarding address, your letter, as well as others, never reached them.—Why do you need literature about adult education? I don't know how to get hold of it.—The photographs haven't arrived, hope you didn't take them with the wrapping of the film!

Franz

October 30, 1916

Dearest, not a letter, please don't insist upon a letter; if I had something as commendable to report about myself as you had in your last letter, how my pen would race to let you know! But as it is —— My life is made up of two parts, the one feeds on your life with bulging cheeks and could in itself be happy and a great man; but the other part is like a cobweb come adrift; being free of tension, free of headaches is its supreme though not too frequent joy. What can we do about this second part? Soon it will be two years since it did any work, and yet it consists of nothing but the capacity and longing for this work. Well, soon, 10 or 11 days from now, I do hope we shall be together; this happy anticipation, however, creates too much anxiety for much writing. May nothing happen to prevent it!

Enclosed, a number of oddments:

1.) Picture of Ottla, an extraordinarily bad one, though. The touched-up teeth, and the opening at the corner of her mouth, are not even its worst defects.

2.) Buber's letter in which, on re-reading it today, I really cannot find anything remarkable. I don't know why I ever mentioned it and am sending it only because you, misled by my remarks, keep asking for it.

3.) An appeal, as an example of that other part's activities.[94] You will find my name among the signatories; originally I was meant to be high up on the organizing committee, but then, and indeed without too much effort, my name slipped into the large group. The text (like that of so many others) is also mine. Well, no more about this.

4.) The program for the readings. On the last page but two you will see the "Judgment" advertised. But Wolff—incidentally without having let me know—again seems to be trying to suppress it.[95] However, since I myself am lifeless and merely listen to life throbbing in my temples, it doesn't matter.

Don't worry, dearest, about my judge. The reassuring (and if you like, the disturbing) thing about it is that she gets her facts from 5 to 10 brief conversations, all of which took place at least 6 months ago. See you soon, see you soon!

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] October 31, 1916

Dearest, during the last few days I was too busy to write from the office. Your last letter was dated Friday, today there was nothing.—Needless to say, with you in charge the children's library should not continue to be so inadequately stocked; so today, as a small basic start, I had Schaffstein's little blue books[96] sent to you. They are bound in boards, like your "Peter Schlemihl"; clothbound would of course be better, but too expensive. Perhaps they could be bound in one of the Home's workshops before being used. These are books for all age-groups; overcautious segregation surely is unnecessary. As a matter of fact, for boys Schaffstein's green books, my favorites, are best, but I didn't want to send them all at once, so I will let you have these later. Among them, for example, is one book that affects me so deeply that I feel it is about myself, or as if it were the book of rules for my life, rules I avoid, or have avoided (a feeling I often have, by the way); the book is called *The Sugar Baron*, and its final

chapter is the most important.[97] Actually, it is very difficult to decide between one children's book and another. If I were asked to name the best children's books from my own experience, I would probably choose the little volumes by Hoffmann,[98] obvious trash. How beautiful the books we're reading new will seem in the next world!

I will tell you my actual suggestions for the library in due course.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] November 1, 1916

Dearest, what's this? You are now threatening not to come? After these endless minor difficulties, of which now only one remains, there is to be this major one? This must not happen. The decision about your chief's vacation must surely have been made ages ago.—The photographs and your Monday letter arrived today. What a lovely group in the woods! So those are your 9 girls, and Hanff is there, too. This time S. is the only one without a smile. The prettiest would seem to be the coquettish one on the left, in the belted blouse. The picture is somewhat marred by the snaillike pose adopted by the one in front. Big girls, incidentally, and, with the exception of 2 or 3, they have rather typical faces. A face, however, can be fully grasped only with the help of some 1000 pictures. Your girls are also in the two dancing pictures; with an effort they can even be identified, but they do look quite different. The picture of you in the group is so good that it makes up for the poor and rather unintelligible one with the flowers. You will have to explain the 5th picture, in which S. is the only one I recognize.—I don't know if I can get hold of a Hanukkah play. But of course I will try at once.—What do you think of the humiliating treatment (assuming a lie to be merely a humiliation) I receive in that paper[99] I sent you? It is by no means the worst humiliation I have suffered, there are worse on all sides, but it is bad enough.—No more threats about not coming!

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] November 3, 1916

Dearest, so it was merely a threat, in order to frighten me. Which indeed it did. But now you are coming, after all. The clearance actually hasn't come through, but the manuscripts did not get there until Monday. I am still nervous about it, and to tell the truth, however harmless the nature of it is, I cannot imagine that permission will be granted. Anyway, in the event of difficulties I will send a telegram; meanwhile I am happy at the thought of seeing you so soon. Our trains join—unfortunately the large timetable is not at hand, and I am merely going by the map—somewhere around Wiesau, which means between 1 and 2 P.M. A great saving of time if we can meet on the train. Needless to say, I will also stay at the Bayerische Hof (for superstitious reasons with the same proviso as above).—I doubt if I can get hold of a Hanukkah play. The only girl I had hoped might be able to provide something (she rehearsed a play last year with the children in our local East European Jewish Kindergarten, I took my nephew there; incidentally the play, meant for very young children, was quite inadequate, but the girl herself is exceptional)—well, even this girl hasn't got anything. The Jüdische Verlag is supposed to be bringing out a Hanukkah book; perhaps they would let you see the galley proofs.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] November 5, 1916

Dearest, early morning again, prior to an excursion to the country. There was nothing from you yesterday, and I must admit I didn't write, either. My journey is becoming more and more probable every day. In any case on Wednesday or Thursday I will send you a telegram either with the lovely words: "We are going" or the sad word: "No."

Franz

*To Felice Bauer's mother*

November 14, 1916

Dear Mother,

Since Felice has told me that my letter from Marienbad was favorably received, I can now write you my birthday letter with a lighter heart than before. As I have often observed, heard, and said, I am not altogether easy to get on with, not even for myself; so if you of all people make the effort to do so—you who are prepared to entrust your daughter to me, and are therefore entitled to make nothing but demands—it is all the more generous. So please (this is where self-interest enters even into birthday wishes) continue to be patient with me in future; may you maintain for Felice, and through her for me, your almost youthful vitality, which is how I remember you, and remain with us for a long time to come.——

I kiss your hand respectfully, and send kind regards to Erna and Toni.

Yours, Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] November 21, 1916

Dearest, not a single word, for days and days. Why? Can't you see the point of my last postcards?[100] Surely they deal with the most essential problems of living together. To stick to this one point: I cannot let you, you of all people, go on accusing me of selfishness, so casually and as a matter of course, and with the ever-present threat of it continuing indefinitely. It does affect me deeply, because it is just. What is unjust is that it should be you, you of all people, who accuse me, thereby denying—far less perhaps by deeds than by words—my right to this kind of selfishness, which is directed less, infinitely less toward the person than the thing. To be convinced that I draw the line in the right place in this respect does of course

presuppose that you have confidence in me. Anyway, my sense of guilt is strong enough at any time, it doesn't need feeding from outside; my constitution, on the other hand, is not strong enough to gulp down this kind of food very often.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] November 23, 1916

Dearest, that's just what I think, too; how else could I continue to exist in my present state (headaches included)? Although I'm far from convinced that quarrels of this kind (that ghastly pastry shop!)[101] will not occur again, at least they won't have the tension of the hurried meeting, that vague nightmarish transitory feeling which adds to bitterness, and so will be borne merely as part of ordinary human misery. You will strike the stone, and the stone will be only slightly scratched. If it does not crumble prematurely, it will stand it, just as the hand will have to stand it.—What occupies me almost entirely at the moment—omitting today's headaches (rare since Munich)—is the thought of my move, and the small but, considering my usual negative frame of mind, largely positive hopes attaching to it. My visit to the renting agent was in itself an achievement not to be despised. Since then 3 women have been hovering around me with far more friendliness than I deserve: the owner of the agency, the caretaker at the house I intend to live in, and the maid of the people whose apartment I propose to take. Yesterday my mother joined them as well, in the kindest possible way. I will divulge no more until the day after tomorrow, when the decision will be made.—Tomorrow the books will be dispatched to you.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] November 24, 1916

This morning I started a postcard to you, was interrupted, and now cannot find the card I started. Normally that kind of thing happens to me only with files. It's annoying.—Dearest, it didn't happen the way you think it did. It seems you really did not get my birthday telegram. Deliveries nowadays are too unreliable. I sent it on the evening of the 17th. It read: "Embraces from afar."—The wording may have been too unusual for it to be dispatched. Perhaps I will complain about it.—For the moment my apartment is again my main preoccupation, and a rather sad one at that. Once more the decision has had to be postponed for a few days, and now it is less certain that I shall get it. Here, mind you, is a 2-room apartment, without kitchen, that seems in every detail to live up to even my wildest dreams. Failure to get it would be hard to bear. Though this apartment might not restore my inner peace, it would at least give me a chance to work; I dare say the gates of paradise would not promptly fly open, but in the wall I might find two slits for my eyes. —I read a letter today from Private Lehmann to Max, in which he pays particular tribute to your hard work.—Christmas? I won't be able to leave.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague, December 4, 1916]

Dearest, your earlier letter, the one that was returned to you, arrived today. It seems we are becoming more trustworthy. My views about Christmas remain unchanged; I know I shall feel a twinge when I finally hear that we are not to meet, but I will not doubt the basic rightness of my opinion.—I am greatly distressed by your headaches. Have you and I together been given but a single share of calm, so that when things with me are slightly calmer, your share is instantly diminished? And the reasons? Surely the uncertainties were no greater a month ago than they are now. And the Home? Doesn't it hold your interest, give you strength?—It is no longer possible for me to read your friend's play. Max sent it off

some days ago before I had even heard of it. He doesn't think it has any merit. Of course I should like to have read it, since you wanted me to, but now that it has gone, there is no point in asking for it back; my opinion of it, let alone my help, would certainly be of no use to the author. Incidentally, Max has recently been overwhelmed with requests of this kind, so may not have read it too carefully.

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, December 7, 1916]

Dearest, nothing for several days now. You mustn't think that I am living in a permanent state of bliss. Perhaps the relative calm is merely an accumulation of discontent, which one night, like last night for example, bursts forth in such a way as to make one howl and spend the next day (today) wandering about like a member of one's own funeral procession.—You ask about notices of the reading. I have had only one more, from the *Münchner-Augsburger Zeitung*. It is somewhat kinder than the first, but since it is in complete agreement with the basic opinions of the other, its kinder tone merely reinforces the actual grandiose failure of the evening. I am not even trying to get hold of the other notices.[102] In any case I have to admit that these opinions are justified, indeed almost true. I have abused my writing as a means of getting to Munich, where otherwise I have no intellectual ties, and after 2 years of not writing had the incredible impudence to read in public, while for the past year and a half in Prague I didn't read a word even to my best friends. Incidentally, back in Prague I remembered Rilke's words. After some extremely kind remarks about "The Stoker," he went on to say that neither *Metamorphosis* nor "In the Penal Colony" had achieved the same effect. This observation may not be easy to understand, but it is discerning.[103]

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] December 8, 1916

Dearest, the postcard in which you write about your chief's Christmas travels arrived after a long delay; otherwise no news for ages. And still getting headaches, according to that postcard. And now you have lapsed into silence. The Home? The Hanukkah play? Before long I shall send you a number of Jewish books. Did you get the parcel of books? Tomorrow I will mail the parcel for Muzzi. No, perhaps I had better wait for further instructions from you. So far I have collected: 2 books, 1 game, sweets, Karlsbad biscuits, chocolate. Beyond this, my imagination fails me. Shouldn't a little dress, or something of the kind, be included? But for this I would need precise instructions; actually, I would get Ottla to choose it for me. Yes indeed, cocoa should be added; so I will get some cocoa as well, and then wait to hear from you.—I am living in Ottla's house.[104] And better than at any time in the past two years. Small improvements are still being made, so the accommodation is gradually approaching perfection. This it will never achieve, because for me perfection would mean being there all night. As it is, I have been going home when the good hours start, at first at 8, then at 8:30, and now even after 9. A strange feeling, locking up one's house on a starlit night in this narrow street. The other day at about this hour my neighbor (Dr. Knoll) stood in the middle of the street with his St. Nicholas[105] bag of sweets and waited for the local children to appear.

Kind regards, Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, December 9, 1916]

Dearest, your letter about the glove arrived today, the 9th. But since your relative is leaving on the 10th, I assume there would be no point in sending it there, especially as I won't be getting it before Monday. I will mail it on Monday, possibly as a "sample without value." That should be all right.—Does so short a letter mean headaches? As long as I don't actually read the word, I cannot believe they exist, such is my confidence in your physical health

(though no less than the other kind)—or does the brevity mean anger? I really couldn't help it.—I continue to live in the little house, but am going to rearrange my timetable and stay there further into the night.—There have been a number of worthwhile lectures in Berlin—Milan, Borchardt, Blümner (*Lucie* by Essig);[106] but whenever I read about them it is too late.—Now instead of going to my home, I have to act as recorder at a meeting.

Franz

[POSTCARD. POSTMARK: Prague, December 13, 1916]

Dearest, no, it isn't going to be as bad as all that, and two days later you probably wouldn't have put it that way. There is no word about you being free of headaches. I am still in the little house, sometimes things go quite well, other times not so well, one has to strike the average.—I have not read the Flaubert, but I shall have to read it soon in order to test your knowledge of human nature.—Alas, the list of Books for Juveniles has not arrived yet, but it should be coming soon. Tomorrow, by the way, I am going to send a book for you to read aloud.—I have now got the gloves, or rather the material, but sending it is not so easy. Next week, however, someone I know is going to Germany and will take it.—I am awaiting instructions about the parcel for Muzzi.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] December 14, 1916

Dearest, yes, the books. They will be with you very soon. The Jewish booksellers are so peculiar, arrangements for dispatch are peculiar, it takes ages. But I am hoping to be able to send them off before the end of the week.—Yesterday I sent you *Little Dorrit.* I'm sure you know it. How could we have overlooked Dickens! One probably could not read the whole of it with the children, but parts of it are sure to give you and them a great deal of pleasure.—Good

luck for the Hanukkah evening. On this occasion (I have no idea of the date) there are sure to be photographs, to which I am entitled.—In my house I am battling with all kinds of difficulties which I create one day, only to cross them out the next with ten times the energy it took to create them. But it's wonderful living there, wonderful strolling home around midnight, down the old castle steps,[107] into the city.

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] December 20, 1916

Dearest, now don't be sad if you don't hear from me. This is truly not as I would want it, it worries me, and at the moment I am so vulnerable. This is pure selfishness which transmits itself to the other soul. All the same, please don't be sad. The absence of news is at least no worse than the accumulation of letters.—My life is monotonous and proceeds within the prison of my innate, as it were threefold misfortune. When I am unproductive I am unhappy; when I am productive there isn't enough time; and when I count on the future then at once there is the fear, a variety of fears, that I shall be more than ever unable to work. An exquisitely calculated hell. Yet—and this is the main point—not without its good moments.—Muzzi's present is going to be especially nice this time; Ottla carried out the commission. It's silly the way I am always undecided about this address, the way you are about my uncle's. I hope Azstalos utca 2, care of Frau Guttmann, is correct.

The other day you mentioned some kind of solution to our main problem. Is there nothing you can add to that?

Franz

[POSTCARD]

[Prague,] December 22, 1916

Dearest, no news for some days now. The parcel for Muzzi was mailed yesterday; nice things; there was but one snag—no suitable game could be found, so a box of building bricks was sent. The rest, however, will compensate for this incompetence. Yesterday I sent you the list of Books for Juveniles, and today a children's book; slowly it will all fall into place. The gloves, however, are still here. That friend of mine is not leaving until next week. Once again I have housing worries; one day I must tell you all about them in chronological order. Otherwise, things with me vary; my health, at any rate, is better. Yesterday I was reminded of Munich; Kölwel sent me three poems.[108] No doubt they spring from a pure and in many ways innocent heart, but they seemed to be better in Munich than they are here. With regard to the recently mentioned impudence[109] (by the way, I like the name Blumstein as such: the gentle and the firm side by side; the gentle, moreover, has sacrificed two of its letters in order to come closer to the firm[110])—well, for my impudence in this respect I have been punished by a letter from the actor Löwy (I have often mentioned him to you). He is now having great success in Budapest, and is making wild (and by no means justified) accusations against me, saying I hadn't done enough for him here, had merely trifled with him.

Franz

*Franz Kafka's mother to Felice Bauer's mother*

Prague, December 31, 1916

My dear Anna,

The approaching New Year gives me once again the pleasant opportunity to send you a few lines and at the same time to convey to you our heartfelt wishes for the coming year. May the Almighty bring this terrible war to an end, so that our hearts and minds can be calm again and life once more have pleasant things in store for us and our children. We are all well, thank God; working hard and looking forward to the future with confidence. How are you and your children? I think of you all very often. I had hoped that Felice

might surprise us with a visit at Christmas, but probably she could not manage to get away. We would all be very pleased to see her and hope she will come very soon.

Our sons-in-law are well, thank God—as well as one can be in wartime. How is Aunt Emilie? Will you please give her our kindest regards.

While hoping to hear good news of you before long, I send my best regards and remain affectionately,

yours, Julie Kafka

> Give your children our warmest greetings and kiss our dear Felice for me. My husband and all the children send their kindest regards.

[End of December 1916/beginning of January 1917][1]

Dearest, herewith the saga of my apartment. A vast subject. It scares me; I won't be able to cope with it. Too much for me. I can't describe more than a thousandth part of it in writing, and won't be able to recall more than a thousandth part of that, and of this I won't succeed in making clear to you more than a thousandth part, and so on. Nevertheless it has got to be done, I want to hear your advice. So read carefully, and advise me well. You are acquainted with my two years of suffering, insignificant compared to the world's suffering during that period, but bad enough for me.

A comfortable, pleasant corner room,[2] two windows, a door onto the balcony. A view over any number of roofs and churches. Tolerable neighbors, since with a little ingenuity I never have to see them. Noisy street, heavy carts first thing in the morning, to which however I have almost grown accustomed. And yet, for me, the room all but uninhabitable. Although it is situated at the end of a long hall and is seemingly quite secluded, the house is built of concrete, and until past 10 o'clock I hear, or rather heard, the sighs of the neighbors, the conversation of the people below, and now and then a crash from the kitchen. Moreover, above the flimsy ceiling is the attic, and as I was about to start work I never knew which

evening a housemaid would choose to hang up the washing and literally, quite innocently, put the heel of her boot through my skull. Occasionally a piano could also be heard, and in summer—from the semicircle of encroaching houses—singing, a violin, and a gramophone. Nothing approaching complete silence until after 11 o'clock at night. No possibility of peace; total disorientation; breeding ground for every kind of madness; ever-increasing weakness and hopelessness. How much more could be said about this, but let us get on.

One day last summer Ottla and I went in search of a place to live; although I no longer believed in the possibility of real peace and quiet, I nevertheless set off in search. We saw a number of places on the Malá Strana, and I kept thinking, if only there were a quiet hole in some attic in one of the old palaces, where at last one could stretch out in peace. Nothing; we found nothing suitable. For fun we made inquiries in the tiny little alley. Yes, a small house could be rented from November. Ottla, who in her own way is also looking for peace and quiet, fell in love with the idea of renting this house. I, in my innate weakness, advised her against it. The idea that I too could be there hardly entered my head. So small, so dirty, so uninhabitable, with every kind of defect. But she insisted. When it was vacated by the large family who had been living there, she had it painted, bought a few pieces of bamboo furniture (I don't know of any chair more comfortable than this), and kept it, and still keeps it, a secret from the family.

At about this time I returned from Munich with renewed courage, went to a renting agent, and almost the first thing they offered me was an apartment in one of the most beautiful palaces.[3] Two rooms, a hall, half of which had been converted into a bathroom. Six hundred kronen a year. It was like the fulfillment of a dream. I went to see it. The rooms high and beautiful, red and gold, rather like Versailles. Four windows overlooking a quiet, dreamy courtyard, one window into the garden. The garden! On entering the gateway to the palace, one can hardly believe one's eyes. Through the tall arch of the second gate, flanked by caryatids, one catches sight of a

beautifully spaced double flight of stone steps leading to the large garden which rises gradually in a wide sweep up to a belvedere.

But the apartment had one minor fault. The present tenant, a young man separated from his wife, had lived in the apartment with his manservant for only a few months when he was unexpectedly transferred (he is an official), and had to leave Prague. But he had already spent so much on the apartment that he was reluctant to give it up. So he kept it on, and was looking for someone willing to compensate him for at least some of his expenses (installing electricity, building the bathroom, putting in cupboards, installing a telephone, a large fitted carpet). I was not that someone. He was asking 650 kronen (surely little enough). Too much for me. What's more, the exaggeratedly high, cold rooms were too sumptuous for me: after all, I had no furniture, and there were other minor considerations. In the same palace, however, direct from the management, there was another apartment for rent—on the second floor, somewhat lower ceilings, overlooking the street, with Hradčany directly outside the windows. Friendlier, more human, unpretentiously furnished; a visiting countess, probably more modest in her demands, had lived here; her old furniture with a girlish touch about it still remained. Alas, there was some doubt about the apartment being available, which at the time made me feel desperate. And in this frame of mind I went to Ottla's house which had just been finished. It had all the defects of a house newly occupied, but I haven't time now to tell you how we coped with them. Today it suits me perfectly. In every respect: the pleasant walk up to the house, the silence; only a very thin wall separates me from a neighbor, but the neighbor is quiet enough; I take my evening meal up there, and usually remain there until midnight; and then the advantage of the walk home; I have to remind myself to stop, then I have the walk to cool my head. As for life there, it is something very special to have a house of one's own, to keep the world out by locking the door—not of a room, not of an apartment, but of a house; to step out of the front door directly into the snow and the quiet street. The whole place 20 kronen a month, my sister supplying all my needs, the little flower-girl (Ottla's pupil) waiting

on me as little as necessary, everything working very well and all very pleasant.

And now, at this very moment, it is decided that the apartment in the palace is available for me, after all. The manager, whom I had done a favor, is well disposed toward me. I can have the apartment overlooking the street for 600, but without the furniture, on which I had counted. Two rooms and a hall. It has electric light but no bathroom, no tub, but this I don't really need. Now briefly, the advantages of the present position over those of the palace apartment: 1. The advantage of everything remaining as it is. 2. I am content now, why create potential regrets. 3. The loss of a house of one's own. 4. The loss of the walk home at night which helps me to sleep. 5. I should have to borrow some furuiture from my sister who is now living with us; for one of the rooms, which is enormous, I should have literally only a bed. The expense of moving. 6. From where I am now the office is ten minutes nearer. I think the palace apartment faces west, my present room gets the morning light. On the other hand, advantages of the palace apartment: 1. The advantage of change in general, and this change in particular. 2. The advantage of a quiet apartment of one's own. 3. In my present working place I am not independent; I am actually depriving Ottla of it; however sweet and self-sacrificing she may be, when she is in a bad temper she cannot help letting me feel it once in a while. At the same time I am sure she would be sorry if I were to stop coming to her little house; in fact, so long as she can be there now and again at lunchtime, and on Sundays till 6, she is satisfied. 4. Although I won't have my walk home, and going out at night will be difficult because the gate cannot be unlocked from the outside, I can go instead for a nice little walk at night in that section of the park that is reserved for the family. 5. When the war is over I want to try to get a year's leave of absence; this may not be possible at once, if at all. Well, this would mean that the two of us would have the most perfect apartment imaginable in Prague, all ready for you, though only for a comparatively short time, during which you would have to do without a kitchen of your own, and even without a bathroom. Nevertheless, it would be very much to my liking and you could

have a thorough rest for two or three months. And that indescribable park in the spring perhaps, the summer (the family will be away), or the autumn. But unless I agree to take the apartment at once—whether by moving in or simply paying the rent (150 kronen a quarter, crazy extravagance, far above an official's station)—I am not likely to get it. In fact, I have virtually taken it already, but no doubt the manager would gladly release me from the agreement, since quite naturally the proposition is in no way as important to him as it is to me. How little I have said. But now you give your judgment, and soon.

[Prague, September 9, 1917]

Dearest, no evasions and gradual revelations, least of all with you. The only evasion is my not writing until today. I did not keep silent on account of your silence. Your silence was not surprising, what does surprise me is your kind reply. My last 2 letters,[4] though characteristic, were nevertheless monstrous; there was no way of answering them, directly or evasively, and this I knew: I am asleep while writing; I wake up quick enough afterwards, but then it's too late. This, by the way, is not my worst attribute. Here is the reason for my silence: 2 days after my last letter, precisely 4 weeks ago, at about 5 A.M., I had a hemorrhage of the lung. Fairly severe; for 10 minutes or more it gushed out of my throat; I thought it would never stop. The next day I went to see a doctor, who on this and several subsequent occasions examined and X-rayed me; and then, at Max's insistence, I went to see a specialist. Without going into all the medical details, the outcome is that I have tuberculosis in both lungs. That I should suddenly develop some disease did not surprise me; nor did the sight of blood; for years my insomnia and headaches have invited a serious illness, and ultimately my maltreated blood had to burst forth; but that it should be of all things tuberculosis, that at the age of 34 I should be struck down overnight, with not a single predecessor anywhere in the family—this does surprise me. Well, I have to accept it; actually, my headaches seem to have been

washed away with the flow of blood. Its course at present cannot be foreseen; its future development remains its secret; my age may possibly help to retard it. Next week I am going to the country for at least 3 months, to Ottla in Zürau (Post Office Flöhau); I wanted to retire, but for my own good they think it would be best not to let me; the somewhat sentimental farewell scenes which, from force of habit, I am unable to deny myself even now, do rather counteract my request, so I remain a regular employee, and am granted leave of absence. Although of course I am not treating the whole affair as a secret, I am withholding it from my parents. This never occurred to me at first. But when, simply as an experiment, I told my mother casually that I was feeling nervous and was going to ask for a long leave, and she took it all as a matter of course and was not in the least suspicious (for her part she is always perfectly ready at the slightest suggestion to give me a leave for all eternity), I simply left it at that, and this is how it stands for the time being with regard to my father as well.

So this is what I have been keeping secret for 4 weeks, or actually for only one week (the precise diagnosis being not much older than that). “Poor dear Felice”—were the last words I wrote; is this to be the closing phrase to all my letters? It’s not a knife that stabs only forward but one that wheels around and stabs back as well.

Franz

In conclusion, and so as not to give you the idea that I am feeling especially ill at this moment: I am not; on the contrary. True, I have been coughing since that night, but not badly; sometimes I run a slight temperature, sometimes at night I sweat a little, am rather short of breath, but otherwise I am positively better than I have been these last few years. The headaches have left me, and since 5 o’clock that morning I have been sleeping almost better than before. And until then, after all, what I suffered from most were headaches and insomnia.

[Zürau, September 30 or October 1, 1917]

Dearest Felice, a letter from you arrived the day before yesterday. What! A letter so soon?[5] I asked myself, and did not read it for a long time. But then it turned out to be a letter of September 11th, in which you wrote vaguely of the possibility of your trip, and which took so long to reach me because you had addressed it to Flöhau in Moravia instead of Bohemia. And this is the explanation for my apparent failure to reply at the time.

But today, Sunday, your letters of Sept. 24th and 26th arrived. They came early. I did not open them (there was also a letter from someone else; this too remained unopened). Then my mother was here for the day (she told me she had asked you if my spirits had improved, and you said you hadn't noticed). In the evening I still didn't feel like reading the letters; first, as a breathing spell—a breathing spell for me—I wanted to write to you irrespective of what I should find in your letters. In the end, of course, I did read the letters.

In them I found what I was bound to find, and I am put to shame to an extent which you could grasp only if you were not compelled to do what you do and be what you are.

The way you saw me this time is how I have seen myself for ages, only more clearly, which is why I can explain what you saw:

As you know, there are two combatants at war within me. During the past few days I have had fewer doubts than ever that the better of the two belongs to you. By word and silence, and a combination of both, you have been kept informed about the progress of the war for 5 years, and most of that time it has caused you suffering. Were you to ask if I have always been truthful, I could only say that with no one else have I suppressed deliberate lies as strenuously, or—to be more precise—more strenuously than I have with you. Subterfuges there have been, lies very few, assuming that it's possible to tell "very few" lies. I am a mendacious creature; for me it is the only way to maintain an even keel, my boat is fragile. When I examine my ultimate aim it shows that I do not actually strive to be good, to answer to a supreme tribunal. Very much the opposite. I strive to know the entire human and animal community, to recognize their fundamental preferences, desires, and moral ideals,

to reduce them to simple rules, and as quickly as possible to adopt these rules so as to be pleasing to everyone, indeed (here comes the inconsistency) to become so pleasing that in the end I might openly act out my inherent baseness before the eyes of the world without forfeiting its love—the only sinner not to be roasted. In short, my only concern is the human tribunal, and I would like to deceive even this, and what's more without actual deception.[6]

Apply this to our own case, which is not just an arbitrary one, but altogether the one most truly representative of me. You are my human tribunal. Of the two who are at war within me, or rather whose war I consist of—excepting one small tormented remnant—the one is good, the other evil. From time to time they reverse their roles, which adds to the confusion of their war, already so confused. Until very recently, however, despite reverses, it was possible for me to imagine that the most improbable would happen (the most probable would be eternal war), which always seemed like the radiant goal, and I, grown pitiful and wretched over the years, would at last be allowed to have you.

Suddenly it appears that the loss of blood was too great. The blood shed by the good one (the one that now seems good to us) in order to win you, serves the evil one. Where the evil one on his own would probably or possibly not have found a decisive new weapon for his defense, the good one offers him just that. For secretly I don't believe this illness to be tuberculosis, at least not primarily tuberculosis, but rather a sign of my general bankruptcy. I had thought the war could last longer, but it can't. The blood issues not from the lung, but from a decisive stab delivered by one of the combatants.

From my tuberculosis this one now derives the kind of immense support a child gets from clinging to its mother's skirts. What more can the other one hope for? Has not the war been most splendidly concluded? It is tuberculosis, and that is the end. Weak and weary, almost invisible to you when in this state, what can the other one do but lean on your shoulder here in Zürau, and with you, the purest of the pure, stare in amazement, bewildered and hopeless, at the great man who—now that he feels sure of universal love, or of that of its

female representative assigned to him—begins to display his atrocious baseness. It is a distortion of my striving, which in itself is already a distortion.

Please don't ask why I put up a barrier. Don't humiliate me in this way. One word like this from you and I would be at your feet again. But at once my actual, or rather, long before that, my alleged tuberculosis would stab me in the face, and I would have to give up. It is a weapon compared to which the countless others used earlier, ranging from "physical incapacity" up to my "work" and down to my "parsimony," look expedient and primitive.

And now I am going to tell you a secret which at the moment I don't even believe myself (although the distant darkness that falls about me at each attempt to work, or think, might possibly convince me), but which is bound to be true: I will never be well again. Simply because it is not the kind of tuberculosis that can be laid in a deckchair and nursed back to health, but a weapon that continues to be of supreme necessity as long as I remain alive. And both cannot remain alive.

Franz

[POSTMARK: Zürau, Post Office Flöhau, October 16, 1917]

Dearest Felice, I am copying out for you the beginning of Max's last letter, because it is indicative of my, or our, situation: "If I weren't afraid that it would worry you, I would tell you that your letters give the impression of great calm. There now, I have told you—which goes to prove that I am not even seriously afraid that this, or anything else, could worry you. You are happy in your unhappiness."

Before I tell you how I answered him: Isn't this what you would say, too? Not quite so crudely, but by implication? If it is, then I will give you *one* of an endless succession of examples: That evening in Zürau, shortly before your departure, you stepped out of the house. I sat on in my room for a long time, then went out to the garden to

look for you, returned, heard from Ottla that you were in front of the house—and joined you. When I said: “So you are here? I was looking for you everywhere,” you answered: “But I heard your voice indoors only a moment ago.” Except for a few insignificant words we hardly spoke to each other again, although we continued to stand on the steps for quite a while, gazing out over the Ringplatz. You were unhappy about the pointlessness of your journey, about my incomprehensible behavior, about everything. I was not unhappy. “Happy,” on the other hand, would have been a very false description of my condition. I was tormented, but not unhappy; I did not *feel* the whole tragedy as much as I saw it, recognized it, and diagnosed it in its immensity which surpasses all my strength (my strength as a living man at least); and in this knowledge I remained relatively calm, my lips shut tight, very tight. That in doing so I probably put on a bit of an act is something for which I can readily forgive myself, because the spectacle before me (admittedly not for the first time) was so hellish that one was bound to try to help the audience by introducing some diverting music; it did not succeed, as it hardly ever does, but it did take place.

What I wrote to Max was much the same, I mean of course in the same vein.[7] Actually his observation about finding happiness in unhappiness is beyond me, and is a kind of contemporary criticism. I don’t know if he has put it into an article yet, but it has been on his mind for a long time. Whatever he makes of it—an observation, a thing to be deplored, at worst even a warning—he may indeed be right; but what he must not do, as is his wont, is make it an accusation, a reproach. “Finding happiness in unhappiness,” which means simultaneously “finding unhappiness in happiness” (although the former may be the more decisive)—these words may have been said when Cain was branded. It means being out of step with the world; it means that he who bears the mark is the one who has destroyed the world and, incapable of resurrecting it, is hunted through the ruins. Unhappiness, however, is not what he feels, since unhappiness belongs to life and this he has disposed of, but he sees the fact with inordinate clarity, and in this sphere that amounts to unhappiness.

As for my physical condition, it is excellent; I hardly dare inquire after yours.

Next Saturday Max is giving a Zionist lecture in Komotau, quite near here; I am joining them on the train; on Sunday afternoon we go to Zürau, and that evening we all travel back to Prague—I to the specialist, the dentist, and the office. All three visits will be a great ordeal for me, the journey itself the greatest of all. I hope to be back in 2 or 3 days.

Max's visit here is due solely to the chance of his lecture at Komotau, for earlier on, and giving them specific reasons, I had asked Max, Felix, and Baum not to come and see me.

I don't know Kant, but the sentence is surely applicable to nations only; it would hardly apply to civil wars, to "inner wars," where peace would be of a kind desirable only for one's ashes.

Franz

*The following two fragments were found in Max Brod's archives, and were either drafts for letters or else parts of letters that were never sent. The first, to Grete Bloch, may have been written shortly before Kafka's unmailed letter to her of December 15/16, 1913, or may be a continuation of that letter. The second bears a note in Max Brod's writing: "Draft of a letter, probably to F."*

*To Grete Bloch*

[LETTERHEAD: Chamber of Deputies]

(Now this old paper from last summer's Congress is all I have.) But these words may be too big. By not answering letters one can easily become estranged from the other, through one's own fault. Yet you sat opposite me, were far more human than I was, understood far better and far more than I, who just sat there like a figure of clay; on the other hand one has to admit that there can be no clay on earth other than this celestial one. (And in a sense you must be aware of this, or you wouldn't have put up with me in this

way.) That's why I think I put my questions too severely in the foregoing. Whatever you'll tell me will no doubt at this moment be right, and even unasked, no doubt you'll reply as soon as you can; though I can hardly refrain from asking you to do so.

Will you be going to Berlin for Christmas? If so, you will be passing through Prague and one can see and talk to you at the station. Do let me know the day and the time. Don't be afraid that I shall squeeze into the compartment to join you. I shall stay here quietly and, as in the past and in the future, I shall continue to spend Christmas sleeping, daydreaming, and idling.

Incidentally, you do lead a strange life in Vienna. I, for whatever infamous reasons, don't often say positive things about myself, but one thing I can say: I can understand things such as your life there, can understand them up to the hilt, *to the point where it becomes really hot.*

And by the way, to conclude with an outrageously tactless question: if you earn so much money, why is your room small and dark? Perhaps you don't feel the need for a large, light room. And yet your comments on it sound almost regretful.

With kindest regards, yours, Franz K.

One more thing I want to say: there were and are moments when —in reality or from my recollection, usually from my recollection— your way of looking at me—something more than what you are and, in essence, something higher seems to break through; but, as in other respects, I am too feeble to hold on to it, or to hold on to myself in face of it.

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* [ADDED BETWEEN THE LINES] Why do you ask in this way?

† [ADDED BETWEEN THE LINES] to whom I have divulged nothing

‡ [BETWEEN THE LINES] Anyway I believe I wrote you 2 letters recently, though very insignificant ones.

# *Notes*

*Based on the notes prepared for the German-language edition by Jürgen Born*

The following works are abbreviated in the Notes; all references are to the Schocken editions:

Works by Franz Kafka

*Amerika, A Novel.* New York, 1962.

*Briefe: 1902–1924.* New York, 1958.

*Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings.* New York, 1954.

*Diaries.* Vol. I: 1910–1913; Vol. II: 1914–1923. New York, 1948.

*The Great Wall of China: Stories and Reflections.* New York, 1946, 1970.

*The Penal Colony: Stories and Short Pieces.* New York, 1948.

Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography.* New York, 1960.

## 1912

1 Max Brod's father, Adolf Brod, was president of the Union Bank in Prague. At the time, he, his wife, and their sons, Max and Otto, lived at Schalengasse (Skořepka) 1; their daughter Sophie was married to Max Friedmann, a businessman; he was a cousin of Felice Bauer.

2 Most likely the trip to Weimar which Kafka and Max Brod had made in the summer of 1912. Since it was largely devoted to visiting cultural sites (houses of Goethe, Schiller, Liszt, museums, libraries, etc.), it may have been called the "Thalia trip" after the muse of comedy.

3 The feast day of St. Wenceslas, patron saint of Bohemia.

4 Possibly a planned performance of the operetta *Circe und ihre Schweine* [*Circe and Her Swine*], published in *Pierrot der Spassvogel* [*Pierrot the Wag*], an anthology from the writings of Jules Laforgue, edited by Franz Blei and Max Brod (Berlin, 1909). The performance never took place.

5 *Arkadia: A Yearbook for Poetry*, edited by Max Brod and published in June 1913 by Kurt Wolff, Leipzig. Kafka's contribution was the story "The Judgment."

6 Kafka's first book, *Betrachtung* [*Meditation*], was published by Ernst Rowohlt, Leipzig, in mid-December 1912.

7 Kafka refers to his letter of September 28 which consisted of four pages measuring 13⅛″ × 8⅛″.

8 Max Brod's sister.

9 Later Kafka enclosed the first with his letter of December 20–21, 1912; the second with his letter of May 18, 1913.

10 See *Diaries* (February 11, 1913), I, pp. 278 f., and Kafka's letter to Felice of June 2, 1913.

11 At the time Kafka sent most of his letters by registered mail.

12 In the First Balkan War (October 18, 1912, to May 30, 1913) an alliance of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro had defeated Turkey. The concomitant strengthening of Serbia posed a threat to the Austrian monarchy.

13 The manuscript of *Meditation*.

14 See *Diaries* (August 20, 1912), I, p. 268: "When I arrived at Brod's on August 13th, she was sitting at the table and yet she looked to me like a domestic. I was not at all curious about who she was, but rather took her for granted at once."

15 An operetta *Das Autoliebchen* [*The Auto Sweetheart*], by Jean Gilbert (pseudonym of Max Winterfeld, 1879–1942), which was first performed by the Berlin Residenz Ensemble in 1912. Kafka writes "Autogirl."

16 Felice's brother, Ferdinand, called "Ferry."

17 Felice's sister Else was married in Budapest.

18 A Viennese monthly promoting Jewish settlements in Palestine, edited by Adolf Böhm.

19 Max Brod's novel *Arnold Beer, das Schicksal eines Juden* [*Arnold Beer, the Fate of a Jew*], Berlin, 1912.

20 The review by Mathias Acher (Nathan Birnbaum, 1846–1937, political and religious writer) had appeared in *Ost und West*, XII, No. 8 (August 1912), cols. 775–76.

21 Max Brod's novel *Schloss Nornepygge: Der Roman des Indifferenten* [*Nornepygge Castle: A Novel of an Indifferent Man*], Berlin, 1908.

22 The quoted line, slightly altered, comes from *Der Talisman* (1893), a fantasy play by Ludwig Fulda (1862–1939).

23 The "Representation House" in Prague at the northeastern end of the Graben (Na Přikopě), with restaurant, coffeeshop, dance halls, and assembly rooms.

24 All Saints' Day.

25 See *Diaries* (January 3, 1912), I, p. 211.

26 Compare the penultimate paragraph in the chapter "The Hotel Occidental" in Kafka's novel *Amerika*, pp. 159 f.

27 Kafka's sisters were Elli (Gabriele), Valli (Valerie), and Ottla (Ottilie). Elli was born on September 22, 1889, and married Karl Hermann; Valli, born September 25, 1890, married Josef Pollak on January 12, 1913; Kafka's favorite sister, Ottla, born October 29, 1892, did not marry until 1920.

28 The asbestos factory was owned by Kafka's brother-in-law, Karl Hermann.

29 In August 1909, Felice Bauer took a job as a shorthand-typist at Carl Lindström A.G., Berlin. In 1912 she was promoted to a

leading position in the firm's Parlograph division.

30 Felix, the son of Karl and Elli Hermann.

31 The story "Aus einer Nähschule" was published in Max Brod's *Weiberwirtschaft: Drei Erzählungen* [*Petticoat Government: Three Stories*], Berlin, 1913.

32 Of Kafka's *Meditation.*

33 *Gabriel Schillings Flucht* [*Gabriel Schilling's Flight*], 1912, drama by Gerhart Hauptmann (1862–1946).

34 Kafka had met the Yiddish actor Yitzhak Löwy, a native of Russia, in October 1911, when he and his company performed in Prague. Kafka became Löwy's friend and followed the activities of his company with great interest.

35 The Yiddish evening took place in the banquet room of the Jewish Town Hall in Prague on February 18, 1912. The text of Kafka's introductory speech may be found in *Dearest Father*, pp. 381 ff. See also *Diaries* (February 13 and 25, 1912), I, pp. 232 ff.

36 Kafka's father, the son of a butcher, did not appreciate his son's vegetarian habits.

37 Rudolf G. Binding (1867–1938), German author.

38 Marie Werner, who came to the Kafka family as governess to the children and then stayed on; she spoke only Czech.

39 Gerti, a daughter of Kafka's sister Elli Hermann. Her recollections of Kafka are contained in a letter to Max Brod of August 27, 1947 (Max Brod, *Der Prager Kreis* [Stuttgart, 1966], pp. 116 ff.).

40 One of the short prose pieces in *Meditation.*

41 At Kafka's express request, *Meditation* was composed in an unusually large type.

42 This unmailed letter was found among Kafka's papers after his death. It was first published in Brod, *Biography*, p. 140.

43 "Der Verschollene" ["The Man Who Disappeared"] was Kafka's title for the (unfinished) novel that Max Brod edited in 1927 under the title *Amerika.* Throughout the correspondence with Felice, Kafka means this work when he refers to "my novel."

44 The sketch “Grosser Lärm” [“Great Noise”], published in the Prague literary periodical *Herder-Blätter*, I, No. 4–5 (October 1912), 44. The sketch was written in November 1911; a first draft appears in *Diaries* (November 5 or 6, 1911), I, p. 133.

45 Here Kafka breaks from the formal *Sie* into the more intimate *Du*. —Trans.

46 The draft of a letter to Felice of November 9, 1912. See note 42, 1912.

47 Presumably it was this letter that prompted Felice to write Max Brod and ask for an explanation of Kafka’s behavior; see Brod’s answer of November 15, 1912. A few days earlier, when he was in Berlin, Brod had telephoned Felice in order to mediate between her and Kafka. In his letter to Brod of November 13, 1912, Kafka remarks: “There [in Berlin] you surely said everything one could possibly say out of goodness, understanding, and sensitivity, but even if an angel had taken your place and spoken into the telephone he would not have been able to prevail against my venomous letter” (*Briefe*, p. 111).

48 Part in a skit performed at the anniversary celebration of Felice’s firm.

49 German “die Fülle der Gesichte,” from Goethe, *Faust*, I, verse 519.

50 In this letter the formal *Sie* is used.

51 The Palais Waldstein with its walled gardens is situated not far from the former Royal Imperial Government Office in Prague’s Small Side; it was built in 1623–30.

52 Kafka’s office hours ran from 8 A.M. to 2 P.M. without a lunch break.

53 First indication of the genesis of *The Metamorphosis*. In the letters up to December 6, 1912, “story” always refers to this work.

54 The Prague branch of Assicurazioni Generali, a private insurance company in Trieste, where Kafka was employed from October 1907 to July 1908.

55 Dr. Robert Marschner, one of the directors of the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute.

56 In July 1912, after the visit to Weimar, Kafka spent three weeks at the Sanatorium Rudolf Just in Jungborn (Harz Mountains).

57 Kafka had met this gentleman, Herr H., a land surveyor from Silesia, during his stay in Jungborn in July 1912; see *Diaries* (*July* 14, 1912), II, pp. 306 f.

58 The Buss- und Bettag [Day of Penitence and Prayer], a Protestant holiday.

59 The first is the letter of November 16, 1912; the second is the second letter of November 11, 1912.

60 3:00 P.M., as Kafka, clarifying a misunderstanding on Felice's part, states in his letter of November 24, 1912.

61 See Max Brod's letter to Felice Bauer of November 22, 1912.

62 Josef Pollak, the fiancé of Kafka's sister Valli.

63 Karl Hermann's asbestos factory. The "farewell" letter appears in *Briefe*, pp. 107 ff.

64 Yüan Tzu-tsai, also known as Yüan Mei, considered the greatest Chinese poet of his century. Kafka found the German translation and the commentary in Hans Heilmann, *Chinesische Lyrik vom 12. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 1905). Max Brod states: "Kafka was very fond of the book; at times he preferred it to all others and he often read from it to me with great enthusiasm" (*Verzweiflung und Erlösung im Werk Kafkas* [Frankfurt am Main, 1959], p. 67).

65 At the time Kafka lived in his parents' home at Niklasstrasse (Mikulášská) 36, a corner building not far from the Moldau.

66 Some of Felice's lady friends at the office had composed a little poem for her birthday.

67 The *Prager Tagblatt* of September 25, 1912, carried a news story, "Beatification of the Ugandan Martyrs." Kafka had cut out the item and enclosed it with his letter (see Appendix). The martyrs were canonized in October 1964.

68 *Die Neue Rundschau*, founded in 1890, was the foremost German literary monthly.

69 This clipping has not been preserved.

70 Oskar Baum (1883–1941), writer in Prague to whom Kafka had been introduced by Max Brod in the autumn of 1904. Baum belonged to the circle of friends of Max Brod, Felix Weltsch, and Franz Kafka. The young writers met almost every weekend and read to each other from their works.

71 Max Brod confirms that Kafka read *The Metamorphosis* to them on November 24, 1912, but assumed it was the entire story (Brod, *Biography*, p. 128).

72 Cf. Kafka's letter of December 3, 1912.

73 The Yiddish Actors' Company of which Yitzhak Löwy was a member.

74 Kafka used a provincial term (*Meistbot*) for highest bid, which would have been unfamiliar to a Berliner.

75 This friend was Dr. Friedrich Schiller, a city official in Breslau. Cf. *Diaries* (September 8 and 12, 1912), I, pp. 271 f., and (July 11–20, 1912), II, pp. 304 ff.

76 Max Brod, *Die Höhe des Gefühls* (Leipzig, 1912).

77 Friedrich Feigl (1884–1966), painter and graphic artist whom Kafka mentions repeatedly in succeeding letters. In 1894 he had been a classmate of Kafka's in the Altstädter German Gymnasium.

78 The amateur performance at the anniversary celebration of the Carl Lindström concern.

79 Invitation of the Herder Association in Prague.

80 Herbert Eulenberg (1876–1949), German author and dramatist, gave a reading at the Prague literary society Concordia on December 1.

81 Valli Kafka was married on January 12, 1913.

82 See *Diaries* (August 20, 1912), I, p. 268.

83 Probably Max Brod, who had visited Felice in Berlin around the middle of November 1912; cf. Max Brod's letters of November 15 and 22, 1912.

84 In October 1910, with Max and Otto Brod.

85 The Institute's annual report for the calendar year 1910 contained a report by Kafka on "Measures for the Prevention of Accidents" that dealt with planing machines, cylindrical cutters, and cutter heads. An extract is reprinted in Brod, *Biography*, pp. 83 f.

86 The board elections of the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute; see letter of December 5, 1912.

87 See Kafka's letter of November 30, 1912.

88 Otto Stoessl (1875–1936), Austrian novelist and essayist. Kafka enclosed a clipping from the publishers' catalogue, *Das Buch des Jahres 1912*, which showed a picture of Stoessl accompanied by a quotation from a review of his novel *Morgenrot* [*At Sunrise*].

89 Not identified.

90 Cf. *Diaries* (September 25, 1912), I, p. 278, on his first reading the story to his friends: "There were tears in my eyes. The indubitability of the story was confirmed."

91 Refers to Yüan Tzu-tsai's poem "In the Dead of Night." See Kafka's letter of November 24, 1912.

92 See Kafka's letter of November 15, 1912.

93 Presumably the public reading of Prague authors on December 4.

94 Paul Wiegler (1878–1949), author, critic, and translator. His review appeared in *Bohemia*, December 6, 1912, p. 12; he says about Kafka: "His short story 'The Judgment' demonstrates the appearance of a great, surprisingly great talent, passionate and disciplined, which already has the strength to go its own way."

95 A seaside resort on the island of Rügen.

96 A popular card game.

97 Feast of Lights, commemorating the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem by Judah the Maccabee (164 B.C.).

98 The Sanatorium Just, June 1912.

99 See Kafka's second letter of November 28, 1912.

100 Kafka here uses the formal *Sie* since the open postcard was addressed to Felice's office.

101 The publicity postcard of the Berlin weekly *Die Aktion* showed a portrait drawing of August Strindberg by Max Oppenheimer (1885–1954). *Ensam* (1903) is not a short story, but the last volume of his autobiographical novels.

102 The widow of Kafka's uncle, Heinrich Kafka, lived in Leitmeritz; she had married again.

103 See note 88, 1912.

104 Wilhelm Herzog (1884–1960), German editor and critic. His article "Was ist modern?" ["What is Modern?"] appeared in *Berliner Tageblatt*, December 10, 1912.

105 *Der Weltfreund* (Berlin, 1911), poems by Franz Werfel, his first book.

106 The original edition of *Meditation* bears the dedication "To M.B." [Max Brod].

107 Not identified.

108 Maximilian Harden (1861–1927), influential writer and editor of the political weekly *Die Zukunft* (1892–1922).

109 Much-frequented resort in the Riesen Gebirge.

110 Felice's younger sister who was also a typist at the Carl Lindström concern in Berlin.

111 Mountain pass and resort south of Vienna.

112 Section of Berlin.

113 See note 12, 1912; both Austria and Russia had begun to mobilize in late November and early December 1912.

114 The Alchimistengässchen near the cathedral. Later Ottla rented a house on this street, where Kafka did his writing during the winter 1916–17.

115 See letter of December 25–26, first paragraph; the fragment of this story seems not to have been preserved.

116 Felix Weltsch (1884–1964), author of philosophical works and librarian at Prague University; wrote extensively on Kafka.

117 The Sanatorium Just.

118 December 26.

119 The two questions (*Berliner Tageblatt*, December 25, 1912, Section 4) were: "Should he be handsome? Should she be intelligent?" Answers were sent in by a number of prominent writers, among them Franz Werfel.

120 Cf. *Amerika*, pp. 247 ff., and *Diaries* (June 2, 1912), I, p. 263. On June 1, 1912, Kafka attended a lecture by the Czech politician Dr. František Soukup on "America and Its Officials," from which he learned about such demonstrations.

121 Ricarda Huch (1864–1947), German novelist and historian.

122 Selma Lagerlöf (1858–1940), Swedish author, awarded Nobel Prize in 1914.

123 Jens Peter Jacobsen (1847–85), Danish poet and novelist, author of *Gurrelieder*.

124 Herbert Eulenberg; see note 80, 1912. His *Schattenbilder* (1910, 1912, and 1915), brief vignettes of cultural history, were widely read at the time.

125 Until 1918 a toll was collected on all Prague bridges (except the Charles Bridge).

126 The book was Robert Rehlen, ed., *Berühmte Aussprüche und Worte Napoleons von Corsika bis St. Helena* [*Famous Utterances and Sayings of Napoleon from Corsica to St. Helena*], Leipzig, 1906.

127 Suburb of Berlin.

# 1913

1 In 1913 Herbert Eulenberg was awarded the Volks-Schiller Prize for his play *Belinde*.

2 The image obviously refers to the photograph mentioned in Kafka's letter of December 3, 1912.

3 See letter of December 29–30, 1912.

4 Allusion to a scene in *Amerika*, p. 253.

5 Cf. *Amerika*, pp. 262 ff.

6 See note 23, 1912.

7 At the time the president of the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute was Dr. Otto Přibram. His son, Ewald Přibram, was a friend of Kafka's during the last gymnasium years and at the university. See Kafka's letter of March 10–11, 1913.

8 Ola Hansson, "Erinnerungen an Strindberg," *Die Neue Rundschau*, No. 11 (1912), 1536 ff., and No. 12 (1912), 1724 ff.

9 Cf. "Letter to His Father," in *Dearest Father*, p. 165.

10 "Der Mythos der Juden" ["Myth in Judaism"], address given at the Bar Kochba Society. Published in part in *Vom Judentum: Ein Sammelbuch* [*On Jewishness: A Collection of Essays*], edited by the Association of Jewish Students Bar Kochba in Prague (Leipzig, 1913), pp. 21 ff. The English version appears in Martin Buber, *On Judaism* (New York, 1967), pp. 95–107.

11 Kafka refers to the edition of *Education sentimentale* which was of interest because of its "crossed-out" lines and appendix.

12 *Chinesische Geister- und Liebesgeschichten*, edited and introduced by Martin Buber (Frankfurt am Main, 1911); a similar collection of stories, edited and translated by Rose Quong, and with Martin Buber's original introduction, was published as *Chinese Ghost and Love Stories* (New York, 1946).

13 Gertrude Eysoldt (1870–1955), member of the Reinhardt Ensemble in Berlin.

14 Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Jedermann* was performed at the Neue Deutsche Theater in Prague on May 12, 1912.

15 *Die Gartenlaube*, a family magazine, widely read by the middle classes in the nineteenth century.

16 Johann Ludwig Uhland (1787–1862), German poet and philologist; Jean Paul (Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, 1763–1825), German novelist; Johann Gottfried Seume (1763–1810), German author; Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866), German poet and Orientalist, author of anti-Napoleonic sonnets ("Bard") and *The Wisdom of the Brahmin* ("Brahmin").

17 The Ballets Russes gave performances at the Neue Deutsche Theater in Prague in the spring of 1910. See Kafka's remarks about Eugenie Eduardova in *Diaries* (1910), I, pp. 9 ff.

18 Tamara Karsavina (1885–), successor of Pavlova in the Ballets Russes.

19 Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950), Swiss composer and teacher of eurythmics; in 1910 be founded his own school in Hellerau near Dresden. Kafka visited it in 1914.

20 See Kafka's letter of January 14–15, 1913.

21 See Kafka's letter of November 24, 1912.

22 Waslaw Nijinsky (1890–1950), star of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

23 Lydia Kyast (1885–1959).

24 In all probability the novel (*Amerika*) so often mentioned in previous letters.

25 Obviously *Chinese Ghost and Love Stories.* See note 12, 1913.

26 Buber had published two books of hasidic legends, *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman, ihm nacherzählt*, Frankfurt am Main, 1906 [*Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, New York, 1956], and *Die Legende des Baalschem*, Frankfurt am Main, 1908 [*The Legend of the Baal Shem*, New York, 1955].

27 See Kafka's letter of November 24, 1912.

28 In German *Hörmuschel* ("listening shell").—Trans.

29 An animated-picture viewing device in which a series of views is printed on paper and mounted around the periphery of a wheel;

the wheel is turned rapidly, thus giving the impression of animation.

30 See Kafka's letter of November 24, 1912.

31 Gertrude Kircheisen, *Die Frauen um Napoleon* (Munich, 1912).

32 Friedrich Hebbel (1813–63), German dramatist. A critical edition of his letters and diaries began to appear in 1911.

33 Max Brod, *Ein tschechisches Dienstmädchen* (Berlin, 1909).

34 Otto Pick's review of *Meditation* in *Bohemia*, January 30, 1913. For Pick, see note 39, 1913.

35 Intended for Felice's mother, who secretly read Kafka's letters. See Kafka's remark in his letter of December 14–15, 1912.

36 This letter has not been preserved.

37 See note 105, 1912.

38 Kurt Pinthus (1886–), publicist and critic, at the time a reader for Kurt Wolff.

39 Otto Pick (1887–1940), *Freundliches Erleben.* Pick was a Bohemian poet and writer, and a translator from the Czech.

40 The literary supplement of the *Berliner Tageblatt.*

41 The family of Kafka's friend Felix Weltsch.

42 Felix Weltsch and Max Brod, *Anschauung und Begriff* (Leipzig, 1913); the volume was published by Kurt Wolff in the latter part of February 1913.

43 Hermann Cohen (1842–1918), *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (*System der Philosophie*, Vol. I), 1902.

44 Probably "The Stoker," the first chapter of *Amerika.*

45 Heinrich von Kleist's (1777–1811) short story "Michael Kohlhaas" (English translation by Martin Greenberg in Heinrich von Kleist, *The Marquise of O—and Other Stories*, New York, 1960); Kafka gave a reading of the beginning of the story in mid-December 1913 in Toynbee Hall, Prague. See *Diaries* (December 11, 1913), I, p. 320.

46 Otto Pick's review of *Meditation* in the Budapest newspaper *Pester Lloyd*, February 9, 1913.

47 Egon Erwin Kisch (1885–1948), journalist, developed a timely style of reportage as a vehicle of social criticism.

48 Else Lasker-Schüler (1876–1945), author of poetry, plays, and short stories.

49 Not identified.

50 *Hidalla oder Sein und Haben* [*Hidallah, or Being and Having*] (1904), drama by Frank Wedekind (1864–1918). The first performance in Prague took place at the Neue Deutsche Theater on February 12, 1913. Wedekind often acted in his own plays alongside his wife, Tilly (Mathilde Newes).

51 Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931), Austrian playwright and novelist. The works here mentioned are the plays *Professor Bernhardi* (1912), *Zwischenspiel* (1906), *Der Ruf des Lebens* (1906), *Der junge Medardus* (1910), *Anatol* (1893), and *Reigen* (1900); and the novella *Lieutenant Gustl* (1901).

52 Princess Viktoria Luise and her fiancé, Prince Ernst August, Duke of Brunswick and Lüneburg.

53 Max Brod's review of *Meditation*, "Das Ereignis eines Buches" ["A Literary Event"], in *März*, No. 7 (February 1913), 268 ff.

54 The letter of February 14–15. See note 56, 1913.

55 In his postcard to Max and Elsa Brod of February 4, 1913 (*Briefe*, p. 113).

56 The letter of February 14–15, which was intended to reach Felice on Sunday.

57 Kafka's faith was soon shaken: see his letter of March 17–18, 1913.

58 Kafka was made vice-secretary of the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute on March 1, 1913. His detailed application for a raise and a promotion of December 11, 1912, was published by Jaromír Louěžil in the magazine *Sborník Národního Musea v Praze*, VIII, No. 2 (1963), 65 ff.

59 Probably the concluding section of *The Metamorphosis*; see note 71, 1912.

60 The unfinished story about Ernst Liman. See *Diaries* (February 28, 1913), I, pp. 280 ff.

61 Felice's sister Else, in Budapest.

62 A film after a play, *Der Andere* (1893), by Paul Lindau (1839–1919); Albert Bassermann (1867–1952) played the leading part.

63 In December 1910 Kafka had seen a production of *Hamlet* with Bassermann in the title role; see his postcard to Max Brod of December 9, 1910 (*Briefe*, p. 84).

64 Tragedy (1847) by Karl Gutzkow (1811–78). Uriel Acosta (c. 1585–1640) was a Portuguese philosopher of Marrano parents who reconverted from Catholicism to Judaism, moved to Amsterdam, and was excommunicated by the Amsterdam synagogue as an atheist.

65 There are no entries in Kafka's diaries between February 28 and May 2, 1913.

66 Novel (1774) by Goethe.

67 Oskar Baum's short story "Die Fremde" ["The Strange Girl"] was published in *Bohemia*, March 13, 1913; on the same day Felix Weltsch's essay on Henri Bergson appeared in the *Prager Tagblatt*.

68 See Kafka's letter of February 18–19, 1913.

69 The two clippings enclosed with Kafka's letter of March 13–14, 1913; see note 67, 1913.

70 An article by Max Brod published in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, March 13, 1913.

71 Max Brod, "Zur Charakteristik der österreichischen Familie" ["Characteristics of the Austrian Family"], *Berliner Tageblatt*, March 23, 1913, Section 4.

72 Kafka had a German translation of the letters (Berlin, 1912) in his library.

73 Good Friday.

74 The letter was delivered by messenger.

75 František Khol (1877–1930), librarian at the National Museum in Prague (1904–15) later literary adviser to the National Theater.

76 Slightly misquoted; literally: “Look at the beautiful female head —with black curls—in magnificent coloring—against a dark background” (Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe*, XXIII [Zurich, 1950], p. 864).

77 In Austrian usage *Gasse* (alley) is the common word for *Strasse* (street). Wherever the translation says “street” Kafka uses *Gasse.* During his visit to Berlin, Felice obviously mentioned that in German the correct word is *Strasse.*

78 See Kafka’s letter to Max Brod of April 3, 1913: “Yesterday I wrote my great confession to Berlin …” (*Briefe*, p. 115).

79 In early April the Bauer family moved from Immanuelkirchstrasse 29, Berlin N.E., to Berlin-Charlottenburg, Wilmersdorferstrasse 73 (corner of Mommsenstrasse).

80 This writer was the Czech novelist Petr Dejmek (1870–1945); the novel alluded to by Kafka is *Hry se srdcem* [*Playing with Hearts*], Prague, 1913. The title page of the book shows a lady juggling with four burning hearts.

81 Kurt Wolff had taken over Ernst Rowohlt Verlag on November 2, 1912, and changed its name to Kurt Wolff Verlag on February 15, 1913.

82 The story “Der Gast” [“The Guest”] by Friedrich Huch (1873–1913), in *Die Neue Rundschau*, No. 4 (April 1913), 457 ff.

83 A review by Albert Ehrenstein of Kafka’s *Meditation* in *Berliner Tageblatt*, April 16, 1913, Section 4. Kafka considered Ehrenstein’s review along with Max Brod’s as the “most kind” of all (see *Briefe*, p. 135).

84 Kurt Wolff wrote to Kafka on April 16, 1913, promising to combine the three stories “The Metamorphosis,” “The Stoker,” and “The Judgment” in one volume (*Kurt Wolff: Briefwechsel eines Verlegers, 1911–1963* [*Kurt Wolff: Correspondence of a Publisher, 1911–1963*], edited by Bernhard Zeller and Ellen Otten [Frankfurt am Main, 1966], pp. 30 f.; hereafter cited as Wolff,

*Briefwechsel*). Subsequently Kafka abandoned the idea and in the end all three stories were published separately in the series *Der jüngste Tag*.

85 Kafka's uncle Alfred Löwy in Madrid.

86 The new apartment of the Bauer family was much closer than the former one to the Askanische Hof where Kafka used to stay.

87 On the occasion of the engagement of Felice's brother, Ferdinand.

88 See note 47, 1912.

89 City 28 miles northeast of Berlin, a summer resort for Berliners.

90 Presumably Max Brod's review of *Meditation*; see note 53, 1913.

91 May 16, the feast day of St. John of Nepomuk (1340?–93?), patron saint of Bohemia.

92 Kafka is alluding to his relationship with a woman in Zuckmantel where he spent his summer vacations in 1905 and 1906. Kafka mentions the woman twice in his *Diaries* (January 24, 1915), II, p. 112: "… that sweetness one experiences in a relationship with a woman one loves, such as I had in Zuckmantel"; and (July 1916), II, p. 159: "I have never yet been intimate with a woman apart from that time in Zuckmantel.… [She] was a woman, and I was ignorant." See also Kafka's letter to Max Brod of mid-July 1916 (*Briefe*, p. 139).

93 The second of the unmailed letters from the "month's waiting-time" (September 28 to October 23, 1912); see enclosure with the letter of December 20–21, 1912.

94 In this letter the formal *Sie* is of course used.

95 See note 31, 1912.

96 The evening took place on June 2, 1913, at the Hotel Bristol in Prague. See Appendix. Löwy recited, sang, and performed.

97 The story "The Judgment" was written two days after Kafka's first letter to Felice, during the night of September 22–23, 1912.

98 *Friede* = peace; *Glück* = happiness (Latin: *felicitas*); *Feld* = field; *Bauer* = peasant.

99 *hinabfallen* = to drop, to fall; *hinfallen* = to fall to the ground.

100 Probably the announcement in the *Prager Tagblatt* of June 1, 1913 (see Appendix); no other has been found.

101 Kafka began this letter no later than June 10. See his remark in the letter of June 10: "I am preparing a treatise which is not yet ready." The date June 16, 1913, appears at the end of the letter.

102 See Kafka's letter of May 15, 1913.

103 In the Central European railway systems, a ticket was required to enter the platforms.

104 Railroads in Central Europe had four classes, the fourth being the cheapest.

105 A review by Heinrich Eduard Jacob (1889–1967) in the issue of June 16, 1913.

106 Suburb of Berlin.

107 Resort on the island of Sylt where Felice spent her vacation from August 1 to 17.

108 See *Diaries* (July 1913), I, p. 292: "The fear of the connection, of passing into the other. Then I'll never be alone again" (Point 5 in the "Summary of all the arguments for and against my marriage").

109 At that time the summer house of the Kafka family was in Radešovice (the picture postcard shows a view of "Landscape and villas of Radešovice"), a small village southeast of Prague.

110 Apparently the "latest plan" in the preceding letter, which Kafka seems to have mailed after the postcard.

111 See note 5, 1912.

112 The correct address was Niklasstrasse 36.

113 Kafka had spent his vacation in September 1909 together with Max and Otto Brod in Riva on Lake Garda.

114 J. P. Müller, a Danish teacher of gymnastics, invented special indoor exercises which were widely popular. Kafka used the system from about 1909 on. The *System für Frauen* was published in 1913.

115 Village three miles north of Westerland, on Sylt.

116 Quoted from Gustav Roskoff (1814–89), *Geschichte des Teufels* [*History of the Devil*], Leipzig, 1869, I, p. 326. The parenthetical remark is Kafka's.

117 Paul Friedrich, "Gleichnisse und Betrachtungen," *Das literarische Echo*, XV, No. 22 (August 15, 1913), 1547 ff.

118 This letter has not been preserved.

119 A poem by Max Brod, "Lugano-See" ["Lake Lugano"], dedicated to Franz Kafka, and published in *März*, VII (August 1913), 247; reprinted in Brod, *Biography*, pp. 80 f.

120 See *Diaries* (August 21, 1913), I, pp. 298 ff.

121 See the following letter. Kafka had first mentioned his intention to write to Felice's father on May 16, 1913, and may have discussed the idea with her during his visit to Berlin at Whitsun.

122 Franz Grillparzer (1791–1872), Austrian dramatist and poet.

123 See note 45, 1913. Felice's sister Erna told the editors that Kafka visited Kleist's grave on the Wannsee with her. She remembered his having tarried there for a long time "deeply immersed in thought."

124 The Second International Congress for First Aid and Accident Prevention took place in Vienna, September 2–9, 1913. At the same time the Eleventh Zionist Congress was held, a session of which Kafka attended on September 8.

125 Heinrich Laube (1806–84), writer and for many years director of the Burgtheater, Vienna. The remark occurs in his *Grillparzers Lebensgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1884), p. 164.

126 The House of Parliament in Vienna, built 1873–83 by Theophil Hansen (1813–91).

127 Suburb of Vienna.

128 The sister of the writer Robert Weltsch (1891–) and cousin of Kafka's friend Felix Weltsch; later married the Beethoven scholar Siegmund Kaznelson; see letter of June 10–16, 1913.

129 Albert Ehrenstein (1886–1950), Austrian poet and writer; see also note 83, 1913.

130 Industrial suburb of Vienna.

131 A vegetarian restaurant on Opolzer Strasse, Vienna.

132 Wooded amusement park in Vienna.

133 Play (1902) by Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949), much performed at the time.

134 Not identified.

135 Town at the south end of Lake Garda.

136 Much-frequented winter resort on the western shore of Lake Garda.

137 Kafka found the letter shortly thereafter and enclosed it with his letter of November 6, 1913.

138 Kafka mentions the girl again in *Diaries* (December 14, 1913), I, p. 322.

139 The next day Kafka went from Desenzano to Riva to Dr. von Hartungen's Sanatorium.

140 Ernst Weiss (1884–1940), novelist and physician in Berlin, a native of Brno. Kafka first met him late in June 1913 in Prague and again in September of the same year in Vienna in the circle of Albert Ehrenstein, Felix Stössinger, and Otto Pick. See also *Diaries* (January 24, 1915), II, p. 113.

141 Kafka's room in the Oppelt house on Niklasstrasse at the corner of Altstädter Ring opposite the Niklaskirche.

142 Dr. Hans Bloch (1891–1943), physician in Berlin; Zionist.

143 Presumably four of Kafka's letters to Felice, written between November 27 and December 29, are missing. Kafka enumerates these in his letter to Grete Bloch of January 28, 1914.

144 Kafka mentions the encounter with the Swiss girl several times in his diaries (October 15, 20, and 22, 1913) and once in a letter to Max Brod, September 28, 1913 (*Diaries*, I, pp. 301, 303 ff.; II, p. 220; *Briefe*, p. 121). Kafka promised her never to mention her

name (*Diaries*, I, p. 304), and referred to her only by initials (W. or G.W.).

## 1914

1 Mailed only on January 26.

2 Apparently Felice used the German idiom “wie die Katze um den heissen Brei gehen” [“to skirt the hot pap like a cat”=to beat about the bush].

3 See the draft of a letter to Grete Bloch of December 15/16, 1913, which was found among Kafka’s papers.

4 See *Diaries* (December 12, 14, 15, and 17, 1913), I, pp. 321 ff.

5 *Die Galeere* [*The Galley*], Ernst Weiss’s first novel, was published in 1913.

6 The letter of December 29, 1913 to January 2, 1914.

7 The hotel where Grete Bloch stayed during her visit to Prague at the beginning of November 1913.

8 After his death, Grillparzer’s apartment at Spiegelgasse 21 was transferred to the Historical Museum of the City of Vienna, which is located in the New City Hall.

9 This letter has not been preserved. Kafka mentions it again in his letters to Grete Bloch of March 3 and 9, 1914.

10 See also *Diaries* (March 1914), II, pp. 24 ff.

11 At their first meeting in Prague, early November 1913.

12 Otto Wagner (1841–1918), Austrian pioneer of modern architecture. The Postal Savings Bank was built in 1905.

13 Kafka quotes the telegram in his letter to Grete Bloch of March 13, 1914.

14 First station on the Austrian side along the Prague–Vienna line.

15 The enclosure has not been preserved.

16 There is an echo of this thought in the concluding chapter of *The Trial.* The novel was largely written during the second half of this year after the engagement was broken off.

17 Muzzi (or Wilma), mentioned several times later on, was Felice's niece, the daughter of her eldest sister, Else Braun.

18 City in central Germany southeast of Brunswick.

19 Kafka's letter to Felice of March 21, 1914.

20 The unofficial engagement took place in Berlin on Easter (April 12–13), 1914.

21 Felice's fifth anniversary as an employee of Carl Lindström in August 1914.

22 Lake on the outskirts of Berlin.

23 The official engagement celebration among family and friends.

24 Presumably *The Metamorphosis*, although it was not published until October 1915, in the monthly magazine *Die weissen Blätter.*

25 "Die Aeroplane in Brescia," published in *Bohemia*, September 28, 1909, and the story written jointly with Max Brod, "Richard und Samuel," published in *Herder Blätter*, I, No. 3 (May 1912). English versions ("The Aeroplanes at Brescia" and "The First Long Train Journey") appear in *The Penal Colony*, pp. 297 ff., 279 ff.

26 Max Brod's novel *Tycho Brahes Weg zu Gott*, first published in installments in *Die weissen Blätter* (January–June 1915), then in book form by Kurt Wolff, 1916. The novel carries the dedication "To my friend Franz Kafka."

27 Kafka's uncles Siegfried Löwy, a country doctor in Triesch near Iglau in Moravia, and Rudolf Löwy, a bookkeeper in Prague.

28 An inconspicuous notice appeared in the *Prager Tagblatt* of Friday, April 24, 1914: "Dr. Franz Kafka, Vice-Secretary of the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute, has become engaged to Miss Felice Bauer of Berlin."

29 Kafka refers to the verbal extravagances of metropolitan Germans.

30 Ernst Hardt (1876–1947), German neo-Romantic author of plays, poems, and stories.

31 Grillparzer, briefly engaged but never married to Katharina Fröhlich, maintained a close relationship with her and her two sisters. The note mentioned by Kafka was found after Grillparzer's death and first published in Heinrich Laube's biography, p. 65 (see note 125, 1913).

32 *Der Kampf* [*The Struggle*], Berlin, 1916.

33 See note 91, 1913.

34 Location of the vegetarian restaurant Thalisia in Vienna.

35 The private collection of the princes of Liechtenstein, now removed to Vaduz, Lichtenstein. At times the gallery was closed to the public.

36 The almanac of the publishing house S. Fischer, *Das 27. Jahr* (Berlin, 1913), p. 289.

37 A sister of Felice's father.

38 Probably the *Berliner Zeitung* of May 9, 1914, which contained a review of *The Stoker* by Camill Hoffmann, one of Kafka's acquaintances in Prague.

39 This letter, probably written soon after March 1, 1914, has not been preserved.

40 Play by Frank Wedekind, written in 1911, published in 1912, and first performed in Munich on November 30, 1912; Max Reinhardt first performed it in Berlin on September 5, 1913.

41 See the letter to Felice of February 23–24, 1913.

42 Adler was the Prague representative of Carl Lindström A.G.

43 Workers' Accident Insurance Institute of the Kingdom of Bohemia in Prague.

44 Deutsche Werkstätten [German Workshops], founded in 1911 by Carl Camillo Schmidt-Hellerau (1872–1948), stressed modern design and craftsmanship in furniture.

45 Kafka's mother and his sister Ottla were already in Berlin.

46 Kafka seems to have read this play by Hans Bloch, Grete Bloch's brother, in manuscript. It was never published.

47 Grete Bloch's job in Vienna had been with Joe Lesti Successors.

48 A suburb of Dresden. See note 19, 1913.

49 Presumably the answer to Kafka's letter of July 1, 1914.

50 Kafka is referring to the self-confidence he derived from his literary productivity at the time; see the letters to Felice of November 1, 1912, and March 2–3, 3–4, and 17–18, 1913.

51 Franzensbad (Františkovy Lázně), spa in northwestern Bohemia near the Bavarian border.

52 Written on the day after the engagement was broken off at a conference in the Askanische Hof at which Grete Bloch and Felice's sister Erna were present. The letter was delivered by messenger. See also *Diaries* (July 23 and 27, 1914), II, pp. 65 ff.

53 Possibly one of the letters to Grete Bloch between early May and the end of June 1914. In these letters a number of lines in which Kafka voices strong doubts about the feasibility of a marriage to Felice are underlined in red, probably by Grete Bloch for the purpose of quoting them at the "tribunal in the hotel" (Askanische Hof). See Kafka's letter to Grete Bloch of July 3, 1914: "You needn't have quoted from letters."

54 Kafka used to give small loans to the clerk to whom he dictated and persistently refused repayment.

55 Kafka's brother-in-law, Josef Pollak.

56 Böhmisch-Brod (český-Brod), small town east of Prague.

57 See *Diaries* (October 15, 1914), II, p. 93, where Kafka records the letter from memory.

58 From October 5 to 19, 1914.

59 Kafka liked Erna best among all of Felice's relatives. At his first visit to the Bauer family at Whitsun 1913, she was kinder to him than the rest of the family. When he departed from Berlin after the engagement was dissolved, she accompanied him to the station. "And E. is nice to me, believes in me for some

incomprehensible reason, in spite of having seen me before the tribunal [the confrontation at the Askanische Hof]; now and then I even feel the effect of this faith in me" (*Diaries* [July 28, 1914], II, pp. 68 f.).

60 Carl Bauer died suddenly on November 5, 1914, of a heart attack. Kafka connected this death with the dissolution of the engagement and considered it a sign of the "ruin" he brought to the family; see *Diaries* (December 5, 1914), II, pp. 99 f.

## 1915

1 On the preceding weekend of January 23–24, Kafka and Felice had met in Bodenbach (Děčín), the border town on the Bohemian side of the Prague–Berlin railroad line. During the visit Kafka read to Felice some of his works written in the second part of 1914, among them "Before the Law," which was first published on September 7, 1915, in the Prague weekly *Selbstwehr*, and then in December 1915 in *Vom jüngsten Tag: Ein Almanach neuer Dichtung* (Leipzig, 1916). See *Diaries* (January 24, 1915), II, pp. 111 ff.

2 Kafka's first room of his own in the house where his sister Valli Pollak lived, on Bilekgasse.

3 Compare the story "My Neighbor," in *The Great Wall of China*, pp. 127 ff.

4 Possibly parts of the novel *The Trial.*

5 In the house "Zum goldenen Hecht" ["At the Sign of the Golden Pike"] at Langegasse 705/18 (today No. 16). His landlord's name was Salomon Stein. The room, a corner room with balcony on the fifth floor, had an exceptional view of the roofs and towers of Old Prague and the Laurenziberg across the Moldau.

6 The weekly gathering of Brod, Weltsch, and Baum, which Kafka used to attend. See note 70, 1912.

7 Kafka's brother-in-law Karl Hermann, the husband of his sister Elli, did service in the Carpathians; his other brother-in-law, Josef Pollak, Valli's husband, had been slightly wounded (see Frau Kafka's letter to Felice's mother, November 27, 1914).

8 Kafka accompanied his eldest sister, Elli, on a journey to Hungary where her husband was stationed.

9 Probably Strindberg's *Separated*; see *Diaries* (May 3 and 4, 1915), II, p. 126.

10 Presumably the lines, mentioned in this letter, that Felice had written in an edition of Flaubert's *Salammbô* she had sent him as a present.

11 The German *im Richtigen* is a literal translation of the expression *dans le vrai* as used by Flaubert in a statement his niece Caroline Commanville quoted in her *Souvenirs intimes*, a book Kafka knew. Kafka often used Flaubert's phrase *Ils sont dans le vrai* in his conversation.

12 Presumably Lily Braun, *Memoiren einer Sozialistin* [*Memoirs of a Socialist*], 2 vols., Munich, 1909–11; see Kafka's letter to M.E. (November/December 1920), *Briefe*, p. 282.

13 Kafka's return trip from the joint excursion to Bohemian Switzerland during Whitsun (May 23–24), 1915.

14 Heinrich Weltsch, the father of Kafka's friend Felix.

15 Heine used the lines as motto for Chapters I, II, and XX of "Ideas: The Book Le Grand" (1826) in Part II of his *Travel Sketches*. They come from the tragedy *Die Schuld*, IV, 9 (1816), by Adolf Müllner (1774–1829).

16 Kafka hoped very much to be called up, among other reasons, to escape from the existence and career of an official.

17 Apparently Kafka and Felice met in Karlsbad in June 1915; see the letter of August 9, 1915.

18 From July 20 to 31, Kafka stayed at a sanatorium at Rumburg in northern Bohemia.

19 Refers to “Bachelor’s Ill Luck” in *Meditation*; see *The Penal Colony*, p. 30.

20 As an official of the Insurance Institute, Kafka was exempted from military service.

21 *Tycho Brahes Weg zu Gott*; see note 26, 1914.

22 Carl Sternheim (1878–1942) received the Fontane Prize for 1915 for his three stories “Busekow” (1914), “Napoleon” (1915), and “Schuhlin” (1916), published by Kafka’s publisher, Kurt Wolff; collected in Sternheim, *Die drei Erzählungen* (Leipzig, 1916). Sternheim, who was a millionaire, gave the prize money to Kafka, following a suggestion by Franz Blei.

23 *The Metamorphosis*, first published in *Die weissen Blätter*, X (October 1915), appeared as a double volume (22/23) in the series *Der jüngste Tag* in November 1915 (Kurt Wolff, Leipzig).

## 1916

1 *Vom jüngsten Tag: Ein Almanach neuer Dichtung* (Leipzig, 1916). See note 1, 1915.

2 See note 28, 1912.

3 During the trip to Weimar Kafka made with Max Brod in the summer of 1912; see note 2, 1912.

4 Town in Silesia; Max and Sophie Friedmann were living there at the time.

5 Because of the military censorship of the mails, letters from Prague to Berlin often took five to seven days. Open postcards passed the censor more quickly.

6 Robert Musil (1880–1942; subsequently the author of *The Man Without Qualities*) invited Kafka to contribute to a literary magazine—possibly *Die Neue Rundschau*—in February 1914; see *Diaries* (February 23, 1914), II, p. 22. Musil reviewed Kafka’s

*Meditation* and *The Stoker* in the August 1914 issue of *Die Neue Rundschau.*

7 *Der Kampf*; see letter of May 12, 1914, to Grete Bloch. Weiss sent the book to Kafka, who had read it in manuscript, in the hope that he would review it in *Die weissen Blätter*; an unpublished letter from Ernst Weiss to Rahel Sansara of June 27, 1916, indicates that Kafka refused to do so.

8 A fashionable movie house in Berlin.

9 See Kafka's letter to Oskar Pollak of January 27, 1904 (*Briefe*, pp. 27 f.). See also the critical remarks about Ernst Weiss's *Galley* in *Diaries* (December 9, 1913), I, p. 318.

10 *The Trojan Women of Euripides*, a German adaptation by Franz Werfel. It was performed in Prague on May 24 and 25, 1916.

11 Max Brod, "Die drei Hauptströmungen der zeitgenössischen Literatur" ["The Three Main Currents of Contemporary Literature"], *Zeit-Echo* (Munich), II (1915–16), No. 13, 196 ff.

12 An emergency school founded by Alfred Engel in Prague for Jewish refugees from Galicia. Max Brod lectured there on world literature. Kafka attended these lectures occasionally; see *Diaries* (April 14, 1915), II, pp. 119 f., and Max Brod's account in *Jüdische Rundschau*, XXI, No. 29 (July 21, 1916), 241 f.

13 A small Zionist club whose members were girls from Prague.

14 From July 3 to 13 Kafka and Felice spent their vacation together at the Hotel Schloss Balmoral & Osborne in Marienbad. After Felice's departure Kafka stayed on for another ten days. His headaches and his insomnia, from which he had suffered terribly before the trip, disappeared. In his letter to Max Brod of July 12–14, 1916, Kafka reports: "After the morning in Tepl [July 8] I experienced such lovely and winged days as I did not believe possible for me" (*Briefe*, p. 140). See also note 92, 1913, and *Diaries* (July 1916), II, p. 159, and (January 29, 1922), II, p. 216.

15 While Kafka was absent—the day before, he had accompanied Felice to Franzensbad from where she returned to Berlin—the

room he had so far occupied was let to other people. Instead he was given Felice's former room.

16 *Erdmuthe Dorothea Gräfin von Zinzendorf, geborene Gräfin Reuss zu Plauen: Ihr Leben als Beitrag zur Geschichte des Pietismus und der Brüdergemeine dargestellt* [*Erdmuthe Dorothea, Countess von Zinzendorf, née Countess Reuss zu Plauen: Her Life Related as a Contribution to the History of Pietism and the Community of Brethren*], by Wilhelm Jannasch, in *Zeitschrift für Brüdergeschichte*, VIII (Herrnhut, 1914); the entire issue of 507 pages is devoted to this work.

17 See Kafka's letter to Max Brod [mid-July 1916] in *Briefe*, pp. 141 ff., and the article by Julius Elias on the Rabbi of Belz's stay in Marienbad, *Berliner Tageblatt*, July 20, 1916, evening edition.

18 Kafka had asked Max Brod a few days earlier to send a prospectus of the Jüdische Volksheim [Jewish People's Home] in Berlin to Felice. See Biographical Note on Felice Bauer and *Briefe* [mid-July 1916], p. 141.

19 Magpie.—Trans.

20 Paul Weltsch.

21 Popular restaurant on the outskirts of Marienbad.

22 End of word illegible.

23 Kafka was in correspondence with Kurt Wolff Verlag about the possibility of his taking a trip to Leipzig; there was also a discussion of a plan for a volume to be entitled *Punishments*, which would have combined the three stories "The Judgment," "The Metamorphosis," and "In the Penal Colony" (Wolff, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 37 f.).

24 Kafka writes "fletschern"; the word means "to chew one's food thoroughly," from the American nutritionist Horace Fletcher (1849–1919).—Trans.

25 Presumably "Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor," parts of which he had read to her in Marienbad.

26 In the event of his marriage to Felice, Kafka considered living in Karlshorst, a suburb of Berlin.

27 Dr. Siegfried Lehmann (1892–1958), founder of the Jewish People's Home and a leading figure in Jewish education in Berlin, later in Palestine–Israel. His article "Idee der jüdischen Siedlung und des Volksheims" ["Concept of the Jewish Settlement and the People's Home"] appeared in *Jüdische Rundschau*, XXII, No. 9, 76 f., and XXII, No. 10, 83 f.

28 Klabund (pseudonym of Alfred Henschke, 1890–1928), German writer and poet. Gerson: most probably the actress Theresa Gerson, who played the leading part in the movie *Ein Lied für Dich* [*A Song for You*], 1933.

29 Samuel Lublinski (1868–1910), *Die Entstehung des Judentums* (1903).

30 "Wait, and soon / you too shall rest" from Goethe's poem "Ein Gleiches."

31 *Jüdische Rundschau*, XXI, No. 29 (July 21, 1916); it contained Max Brod's article "Aus der Notschule für galizische Flüchtlinge in Prag" ["The Emergency School for (Jewish) Refugees from Galicia in Prague"] and the quotations from letters mentioned by Kafka.

32 At this time the Bauer family lived in Berlin-Charlottenburg; see note 79, 1913. Here, however, Kafka mistakes the Jewish People's Home for the Jewish Settlement Home which was in Charlottenburg, as he explains in his postcard of August 12, 1916.

33 Friedrich Feigl; see note 77, 1912.

34 See note 16, 1916; the quoted passage is on pp. 86 f.

35 *Memoiren einer Sozialistin*; see note 12, 1915

36 Theodor Fontane (1819–98), German poet and novelist. The quoted passages occur in Fontane's letters to Mathilde von Rohr of June 17 and July 1, 1876; see *Briefe Theodor Fontanes*, second collection, ed. by Otto Pniower and Paul Schlenther (Berlin, 1910), I, pp. 360, 363. Kafka's alterations of the texts have not been indicated.

37 Felice had written on occasion of their first meeting on August 13, 1912.

38 Kafka had accompanied Felice as far as Franzensbad when she left for home after their stay in Marienbad; see note 15, 1916.

39 Dragonerstrasse 22 (today Max-Beer Strasse 5) was the address of the Jewish People's Home.

40 Fontane to Mathilde von Rohr, July 1, 1876; see note 36, 1916.

41 Felice's and Max Brod's relatives Max and Sophie Friedmann; see note 4, 1916.

42 Georg Müller, publisher in Munich.

43 See the postcards of August 19 and 26, 1916.

44 Otto Kaus, *Dostojewski: Zur Kritik der Persönlichkeit; ein Versuch* [*Dostoevski: A Study of His Personality; An Essay*], Munich, 1916.

45 Franz Blei (1871–1942), Austrian author, critic, and editor.

46 Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929), director of royal museums in Prussia (1906–20).

47 On September 30, 1916, Kafka sent Ernst Feigl's poems to his publisher Kurt Wolff in Leipzig; see Wolff, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 40 f.

48 See postcard of August 9, 1916.

49 *Memoiren einer Sozialistin.*

50 Alfred Wolfenstein (1888–1945), German expressionist poet. Kafka accepted the invitation; on November 10 he read "In the Penal Colony" and poems by Max Brod. Felice was present.

51 Presumably Nikolai N. Strakhov's (1828–95) introduction to Dostoevski's writings on literature in F. M. Dostoevski, *Sämtliche Werke*, 2d series, vol. 12 (Munich, 1913).

52 Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster (1869–1966), author, pedagogue, and pacifist. His book *Jugendlehre: Ein Buch für Eltern, Lehrer und Geistliche* [*Youth Guidance: A Book for Parents, Teachers, and Clergy*] (Berlin, 1904) was used as a text in a pedagogical seminar at the Jewish People's Home for the instruction of the helpers, since no corresponding Jewish work was available. See *Das Jüdische Volksheim Berlin*: Erster Bericht, Mai/Dezember 1916

[*The Berlin Jewish People's Home*, First Report, May/December 1916] (Berlin, 1917), p. 15.

53 "Das Problem der jüdisch-religiösen Erziehung" ["The Problem of Jewish Religious Education"], a lecture given by Siegfried Lehmann to the helpers of the Home.

54 Gershom (Gerhard) Scholem (1897–), Jewish scholar, professor emeritus at Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

55 The first publication in the yearbook *Arkadia* bore the dedication "To Fräulein Felice B." See letter of October 24, 1912.

56 The prose piece "A Dream," an offshoot of *The Trial*, was apparently intended to be published together with Max Brod's article "Unsere Literaten und die Gemeinschaft" ["Our Writers and the Community"] in the monthly *Der Jude* (ed. by Martin Buber), I, No. 7 (October 1916), but was then published in an anthology, coedited by Martin Buber, *Das jüdische Prag* [*Jewish Prague*] (Selbstwehr Publishers, December 1916). It was also published on January 6, 1917, in *Prager Tagblatt* (magazine section), and again in *Almanach der Neuen Jugend auf das Jahr 1917* (Berlin: Neue Jugend), pp. 172 ff.

57 *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte* by Adalbert von Chamisso (1781–1838), German Romantic author of French extraction. *Die Weltliteratur* was a magazine, largely printed on newsprint, and devoted to the republication of masterpieces of world literature, often with illustrations.

58 A chapter of *Jugendlehre*.

59 Felice was typing the manuscript of the Report cited in note 52, 1916. The twenty-page brochure bears the dedication "To the sponsors of our work, Dr. Max Brod, Dr. Martin Buber, Gustav Landauer, Siegbert Stern, Rabbi Dr. Warschauer, in gratitude."

60 Hermann Schaffstein in Cologne, publisher of inexpensive juvenile literature.

61 Sholem Asch (1880–1957, novelist and playwright), *Kleine Geschichten aus der Bibel* (Berlin, 1914). An English edition, *In the*

*Beginning: Stories from the Bible*, was published in New York in 1966.

62 Alfred Lichtwark (1852–1914), *Übungen in der Betrachtung von Kunstwerken nach Versuchen mit einer Schulklasse* (Dresden, 1898).

63 Sholom Aleichem (pseudonym of Solomon Rabinowitz, 1859–1916), Yiddish author.

64 The composer Adolf Schreiber (1883–1920). Max Brod wrote a book about him, *Adolf Schreiber: Ein Musikerschicksal* [*Adolf Schreiber: Fate of a Musician*] Berlin, 1921.

65 The writer Alfred Lemm (pseudonym of Alfred Lehmann, 1889–1918), brother of Dr. Siegfried Lehmann, published stories, novels, and articles on cultural politics. Regarding his "Idea of the Middle Land," which Kafka apparently has in mind, see Alfred Lemm, "Wir Deutschjuden" ["We German Jews"], *Die Tat*, VII, No. 11 (February 1916), 946 ff.

66 Comedy (1767) by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81).

67 Yitzhak Leib Peretz (1851–1915), *Volkstümliche Erzählungen* [*Popular Tales*], Berlin, 1913.

68 *Denk nur mal an*: Kafka is mocking Felice's Berlinese.—Trans.

69 Ernst von Wildenbruch (1845–1909), glorified the House of Hohenzollern in his plays.

70 Peter Rosegger (1843–1918), popular Styrian author.

71 Johann Peter Hebel (1760–1826), Alemannic poet and prose writer, admired by Kafka.

72 The Jewish People's Home was located among proletarian tenements near the Alexanderplatz. See Klara Eschelbacher, "Die Wohnungsfrage" ["The Housing Problem"], *Neue Jüdische Monatshefte*, IV, Nos. 11–12.

73 Ben Usiel (pseudonym of Samson Raphael Hirsch, 1808–88), *Neunzehn Briefe über Judentum* [*Nineteen Letters about Judaism*], Altona, 1836.

74 Hugo Bergmann (1883–), philosopher, Zionist, later librarian at the Hebrew National Library in Jerusalem and professor at

Hebrew University.

75 Insel Verlag, publishers in Leipzig, now in Wiesbaden.

76 Probably a reference to the exhibition “Mother and Infant” mentioned in his postcard of September 7, 1916.

77 See postcard of September 23, 1916.

78 See note 56, 1916.

79 Robert Müller had written in his survey article “Phantasie,” *Die Neue Rundschau*, II (1916), 1421 ff.: “Kafka’s otherwise ingenuous narrative art, which is fundamentally German, laudably sound, in the vein of the meistersingers, is being deformed by hypothetical patches on its beautiful material garb.” In his article “Our Writers and the Community,” Max Brod says about Kafka: “Although the word ‘Jew’ never occurs in his works, they are among the most typically Jewish documents of our time.”

80 *Memoiren einer Sozialistin.*

81 The Zionist club mentioned in the postcard of May 30, 1916.

82 Professor Emil Milan (1859–1917), elocutionist.

83 Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach (1830–1916), Moravian–Austrian author of novels and short stories.

84 Gottfried Keller (1819–90), Swiss poet and author of novels and short stories.

85 Theodor Storm (1817–88), north German poet and author of short stories.

86 Jens Peter Jacobsen; see note 123, 1912.

87 For Max Brod as a post office official, see Brod, *Biography*, p. 81.

88 See *Diaries* (October 18, 1916), II, pp. 166 ff.

89 The novelist Auguste Hauschner (1852–1924).

90 Kafka mentions this verdict also in his letter to Max Brod (mid-July 1916) from Marienbad (*Briefe*, p. 140).

91 The songbook of the Zionist Youth Organization Blau-Weiss; Hebrew: Tehelet-Lavan.

92 Friedrich Fröbel (1782–1852), German educator and originator of the kindergarten.

93 Arnold Zweig (1887–1968), *Ritualmord in Ungarn: Jüdische Tragödie in fünf Aufzügen* [*Ritual Murder in Hungary: A Jewish Tragedy in Five Acts*], Berlin, 1914.

94 See Appendix.

95 Kafka's suspicion was unfounded. "The Judgment" appeared at the end of October as Volume 34 in Kurt Wolff's series *Der jüngste Tag*.

96 Schaffstein's blue series was devoted to fiction, the green series to nonfiction (travel, exploration); of the latter, Kafka had several volumes in his library and mentioned two more titles in his diary; *Diaries* (December 15, 1913), I, p. 323, and (September 16, 1915), II, p. 130.

97 Oskar Weber, *Der Zuckerbaron: Schicksale eines ehemaligen deutschen Offiziers in Südamerika* [*The Sugar Baron: Experiences of a Former German Officer in South America*], with illustrations by Max Bürger. Schaffstein's Little Green Books, No. 54 (Cologne, 1914).

98 Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann (1809–94), physician, author of juveniles and of the popular *Struwelpeter*.

99 The paper is not preserved, unless it is the appeal enclosed with the letter of October 30, 1916.

100 These postcards have not been preserved.

101 Reference to their stay in Munich, November 10–12, 1916.

102 Reviews of Kafka's reading at the Kunst-Salon Goltz in Munich on November 10, 1916, in the *München-Augsburger Abendzeitung*, noon edition, November 13, 1916, p. 2. The other review Kafka had seen was in the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, November 11, 1916, p. 3. A third review appeared in the *Münchener Zeitung*, November 12, 1916, p. 2.

103 Rilke and Kafka probably never met personally. Kafka may have heard of Rilke's opinion about his works through Eugen Mondt. Since "In the Penal Colony" was not printed at the time, Rilke,

who then lived in Munich, must have seen the manuscript which had arrived in Munich on September 30 and discussed it with Eugen Mondt. See Eugen Mondt, "München–Dachau, ein literarisches Erinnerungsbüchlein" ["Munich–Dachau: A Brief Literary Memoir"] (typescript in the Municipal Library, Munich), pp. 42 f. Rilke followed Kafka's work with great interest; in a letter to Kurt Wolff of February 17, 1922, he says, "Please put me down especially for anything that appears by Franz Kafka. I am, I might assure you, not his worst reader" (Wolff, *Briefwechsel*, p. 152).

104 Ottla had settled in one of the small old houses on Alchimistengässchen (No. 22), but let her brother, who hoped to find peace and quiet for his work, stay there. He did not spend the nights there but returned home, often quite late, to his room on Langegasse, later in the Palais Schönborn.

105 The feast day of St. Nicholas, December 6, when children are rewarded with presents for good behavior.

106 Emil Milan gave a reading on December 7 in Choralion Hall; on the same day, the poet Rudolf Borchardt (1877–1945) gave a lecture on "Der Krieg und die deutsche Entscheidung" ["The War and the Decision for Germany"] in the large hall of the Berlin Philharmonic; on December 6, Rudolf Blümner gave a reading of Hermann Essig's (1878–1918) novella *Lucie* at the art exhibition "Der Sturm."

107 Die alte Schloss-Stiege (Staré zámecké schody) has 98 steps.

108 Gottfried Kölwel (1889–1958), poet, playwright, and novelist; see also note 50, 1916.

109 The postcard mentioning the "impudence" has not been preserved.

110 *Blum* = *Blume*, flower; *stein* = stone; in idiomatic German the compound would be Blumenstein, hence the two sacrificed letters *en*.

# 1917

1 The copy of this letter—or draft of a letter—was found among Kafka's papers and was first published by Max Brod in *Biography*, pp. 157 ff.

2 The room in "At the Sign of the Golden Pike"; see note 5, 1915.

3 The Schönborn Palace on the Malá Strana, Marktgasse (Trěžiště) 365/15, where Kafka stayed from early March to late August 1917.

4 Not preserved.

5 Shortly before the date of Kafka's letter, Felice had visited him in Zürau on September 20–21; see *Diaries* (September 21, 1917), II, pp. 184 f.

6 See *Diaries* (September–October 1917), II, pp. 187 f., and letter to Max Brod from the beginning of October 1917 (*Briefe*, p. 178).

7 See letter to Max Brod of October 12, 1917 (*Briefe*, pp. 181 ff.).

# *Appendix*

An announcement from the *Prager Tagblatt* of September 25, 1912, enclosed with Kafka's letter of November 24, 1912.

THE BEATIFICATION OF THE UGANDAN MARTYRS

A decree issued on August 13 by the Congregation of Rites announces the opening of proceedings for the beatification of the so-called "Ugandan Martyrs"—22 Christian Negro youths who, 26 years ago, were the first to be martyred for the faith and suffered death at the stake. It was reported from the central office of the St. Peter Claver Sodality in Rome that the cardinals who had this matter under consideration had been moved to tears by the heroism of these young martyrs. The news of the opening of proceedings for the beatification was received by all Negroes, and in particular by those from North Victoria Nyanza, the home of the martyrs, with great rejoicing which they expressed by dancing and much leaping about.

An announcement from the *Prager Tagblatt* of June 1, 1913, enclosed with Kafka's letter of June 1, 1913.

AN EAST EUROPEAN JEWISH ACTOR

On June 2 (at 8 P.M. at the Hotel Bristol) the people of Prague will be given the opportunity to meet a distinguished performer of an art usually banished to inaccessible places, and rarely seen in Central Europe. Many will remember the curious evenings we witnessed last year when a Yiddish theater set up its primitive stage in a small hall in the Altstadt. One was caught up in a strange world where people lived a life of childlike imagination, enthusiasts who needed no more than the boards beneath their feet and a few colored rags on their

bodies, and with an old backdrop, perhaps an armchair for throne, to bring to life dramatic events. The general opinion was that Yitzhak Löwy was the most outstanding performer among the actors who put themselves at the disposal of Yiddish playwrights. One still remembers the performance he gave last year, his portrayal of callous rogues, contrite scoundrels, his roles as servants played like crafty oriental Sancho Panzas, his twitching fingers, his furrowed face etched with his enchanting smile, his gait, the versatility of his beautiful masculine voice. On June 2 we shall be given the opportunity of meeting Y. Löwy for the second time; he will recite, sing, and act, and may allow us another glimpse of his unfamiliar, unappreciated artistry.

> The text of an appeal written by Kafka, enclosed with his letter of October 30, 1916: *A German society for the establishment and support of a military and civilian hospital in Prague for the treatment of nervous diseases in German Bohemia.*

COMPATRIOTS!

This great war which encompasses the sum total of human misery is also a war on the nervous system, more a war on the nervous system than any previous war. All too many people succumb to this war of nerves. Just as the intensive industrialization of the past decades of peace had attacked, affected, and caused disorders of the nervous systems of those engaged in industry more than ever before, so the enormously increased mechanization of present-day warfare presents the gravest dangers and disorders to the nervous system of fighting men. In ways, moreover, of which even the expert can have no adequate idea. According to reliable statistics in Bohemia, there were already in June 1916 more than 4000 war-disabled suffering from nervous illnesses in German Bohemia alone. And what lies ahead? How many people suffering from nervous ailments are still in hospitals outside Bohemia? How many prisoners of war will return suffering from nervous disorders? Incalculable misery awaits help. He who twitches and jumps with nerves in the streets of our cities is but

a comparatively harmless representative of the immense number of sufferers.

What is to be done? We have the choice: We can allow things to go on as they are. We can watch those who return from the front with nervous disorders pouring into military hospitals where only a limited number find their way to the few departments specializing in the treatment of nervous diseases, while the rest get no further than the general military wards. Undoubtedly the specialized departments do arrive at improvements and cures, and are as successful as their inadequate means permit. But how few are the fortunate ones who receive this treatment! And the majority with nervous illnesses who are in general hospitals, what happens to them? With the best will in the world, and the greatest medical expertise, there is no help for them today. For those who defended their country with their lives, the country for which they risked their own and their families' future can provide no help; for help can be provided only in a well-equipped, modern hospital. But since there is no such place, the fate of these unfortunate sufferers is sealed. They are sent home uncured, to add to the numbers of chronic peacetime neurasthenics, victims of permanent and constantly increasing suffering, a torment to their families, a loss to the German Bohemian population, candidates for insane asylums. Is this the reward German Bohemia offers its sons?

*But there is another possibility!* German Bohemia, that is, the entire German-speaking population, can by its own efforts build a large national hospital for the treatment of nervous diseases, plus adequate contributions of course from the government with its vital interest in institutions of this kind in times of peace and war, from the social insurance institutes, private insurance companies, the railroad management, the landowners, industry, and anyone with a warm heart who wishes to contribute however small a donation. A national hospital of this kind, well furnished and equipped like the exemplary ones in Germany, could turn out to be a rich blessing for German Bohemia. Now, and for as long as may be necessary after the war, the hospital could be reserved for war casualties from German Bohemia; but thereafter it should be devoted to its *permanent purpose*—the housing and treatment of *impecunious* German Bohemian compatriots

suffering from nervous diseases. With science and a love of humanity for weapons, we have an opportunity to master, if not entirely at least to a great extent, one of the horrors of war as of peace.

We can choose between these alternatives, or rather, there is no choice. It would be our undoubted human, patriotic, and national duty to take some determined action in this matter, even if the probable success of our intervention were not as great and as promising as it clearly is. Since this is so, speed is all the more necessary.

A start has been made. At a meeting on October 14 in the German House in Prague, representatives from all parties, classes, and authorities of German Bohemia were present. With complete unanimity and a rare spirit of sacrifice, the need for active support for *A German Society for the Establishment and Support of a National Hospital for the Treatment of Nervous Diseases in German Bohemia* with its headquarters in Prague was recognized and decided upon. This Society is intended to form part of the national German Bohemian wartime relief organization, and for the time being will be represented by a *Preparatory Committee* formed and elected at this meeting.

*The first task is to raise funds.* With this in mind we humbly invite you to participate to the best of your ability, and to persuade your friends to participate in this great German Bohemian undertaking, the like of which has never before been seen in Austria.

According to the statutes, contributions can be made in the following ways:

1. By voluntary donations.
2. By becoming a Founder Member of the Society with a donation of 5000 kronen or more; for every contribution of 5000 kronen a Founder Member will have the right to nominate one patient for admission to the hospital.
3. By becoming a Sponsor of the Society with a one-time contribution of 1000 kronen or more. The names of Founder Members and Sponsors will be recorded on a memorial tablet to be erected in the hospital to perpetuate their memory.

4. By joining the Society as a Regular Member with an annual minimum contribution of 5 kronen. A single donation of not less than 200 kronen can be substituted for this annual contribution.

We confidently hope that our request, which is also the request of our beloved country, will not remain unanswered.

Contributions can be sent by means of the enclosed remittance form. For the time being, correspondence should be addressed to: German Society for the Establishment and Support of a Military and Civilian Hospital in German Bohemia, Workers' Accident Insurance Institute, Prague, Pořič 7.

*Prague*, November 1916

This appeal was signed by well over one hundred prominent people from German Bohemia, including Robert Marschner, Otto Přibram, and Franz Kafka himself.

# *Chronology*

## 1912

| | |
|---|---|
| AUGUST 13 | First encounter with Felice Bauer at the house of Max Brod in Prague. |
| SEPTEMBER 20 | First letter to Felice. |
| SEPTEMBER 22–23 | “The Judgment” (short story) written overnight. |
| OCTOBER 14 & 18 | Kafka’s letters to Sophie Friedmann: since there is no answer from Felice, he asks her relative to intervene. |
| OCTOBER 23 | Felice’s reply after the “month’s waiting-time.” |
| NOVEMBER 15 & 22 | Max Brod writes to Felice about Kafka. |
| NOVEMBER 17–DECEMBER 7 | Inception of *The Metamorphosis*; on November 24 a reading of parts of the still unfinished story at Oskar Baum’s. |
| DECEMBER 4 | Public reading of “The Judgment” during authors’ evening of the Prague Herder Association. |
| MID-DECEMBER | *Meditation* published by Rowohlt. |

## 1913

| | |
|---|---|
| MARCH 1 | Reading of *The Metamorphosis* at Max Brod's. |
| MARCH 23–24 | First meeting with Felice in Berlin. On March 24, on the return journey to Prague, meets Kurt Wolff in Leipzig. |
| APRIL 7 | Start of gardening work in Troja, near Prague. April 7–17 Felice acts as her company's representative at an exhibition in Frankfurt am Main. |
| MAY 11–12 | Second visit to Berlin, during Whitsun holidays. |
| MAY | *The Stoker* is published as the third volume in Kurt Wolff's series *Der jüngste Tag.* |
| EARLY JUNE | "The Judgment" published in the yearbook *Arkadia.* |
| JUNE 10–16 | Letter in which Kafka asks Felice for her hand for the first time. |
| JUNE 28 | First meeting in Prague with Ernst Weiss, doctor and writer. |
| AUGUST | Felice spends her summer vacation (August 1–17) in Westerland on the island of Sylt. |
| SEPTEMBER 6 | Travels to Vienna with Director Marschner for the International Congress for First Aid and Accident Prevention; stays in Vienna until |

September 13; visits Eleventh Zionist Congress; meets Albert Ehrenstein, Lise Weltsch, Felix Stössinger, and Ernst Weiss.

SEPTEMBER 14 — Travels from Vienna to Trieste, thence to Venice by steamer.

SEPTEMBER 15–16 — Stays in Venice; travels via Verona and Desenzano to Riva on Lake Garda; from September 22 in Dr. von Hartungen's sanatorium; meets G.W., "the Swiss girl."

OCTOBER 29 — Resumes correspondence with Felice, suspended since September 20.

NOVEMBER 1 — First encounter with Grete Bloch in Prague; begins correspondence with her on November 10.

NOVEMBER 8–9 — Meets Felice briefly in Berlin; visits Ernst Weiss.

MID-DECEMBER — Ernst Weiss visits Felice in her office, and on Kafka's behalf asks for an explanation for long silence.

END DECEMBER — Meets Ernst Weiss in Prague.

## 1914

EARLY JANUARY — Kafka renews his request for Felice's hand by letter; she answers evasively.

FEBRUARY 28–MARCH 1

| | |
|---|---|
| | Meets Felice in Berlin; her arguments against their marriage. |
| END MARCH | Kafka decides to leave Prague unless Felice is willing to marry him. |
| APRIL 12–13 (EASTER) | Meets Felice in Berlin; unofficial engagement; Felice willing to marry in September. |
| MAY 1 | Felice arrives in Prague; she and Kafka start searching for an apartment. (Mid-May Kafka rents a 3-room apartment at Langegasse 923/5.) |
| MAY 26 | Kafka's mother and his sister Ottla arrive in Berlin as guests of the Bauer family. |
| MAY 30 | Accompanied by his father, travels to Berlin to celebrate the official engagement. June 1 (Whitmonday) reception at the Bauers'. |
| MID-JUNE | Ernst Weiss arrives in Prague and returns to Berlin on June 19. |
| JULY 2 | Decision to go to Berlin for weekend of July 11–12 for discussion. |
| JULY 12 | Discussion at Hotel Askanische Hof in the presence of Grete Bloch and Erna Bauer; engagement broken off. |
| JULY 13 | Travels from Berlin to the Baltic; two weeks' vacation, first in Travemünde, then with Ernst Weiss and Rahel Sansara in the Danish seaside |

resort Marielyst. On July 26 returns to Prague via Berlin (meets Erna Bauer).

EARLY AUGUST — Begins to work on *The Trial.*

OCTOBER 5–19 — Vacation devoted entirely to writing; continuation of work on *The Trial* and "The Man Who Disappeared"; writes "In the Penal Colony."

## 1915

JANUARY 23–24 — Meets Felice in Bodenbach. (First meeting since breaking off the engagement.) Among other writings Kafka reads to her the legend of the doorkeeper ("Before the Law," from *The Trial*).

MARCH — Vacates room in Bilekgasse (Bílkova ulice) 868/10, moves to room in Langegasse (Dlouhá trida) 705/18, "At the Sign of the Golden Pike."

END APRIL — Travels with his sister Elli to see her husband, a soldier stationed in the Carpathian mountains in Hungary.

MAY 23–24 — With Felice and Grete Bloch for the Whitsun holiday in Bohemian Switzerland.

JUNE — With Felice in Karlsbad.

JULY 20–31

Stays in a sanatorium in Rumburg (northern Bohemia).

OCTOBER

*The Metamorphosis* published in *Die weissen Blätter*, X (October).

NOVEMBER

*The Metamorphosis* published as a double-issue volume (22–23) in Kurt Wolff's series *Der jüngste Tag.*

DECEMBER

"Before the Law" published in the yearbook *Vom jüngsten Tag: Ein Almanach neuer Dichtung* (Leipzig, 1916).

## 1916

APRIL 9

In Karlsbad with Ottla.

MAY 9

Request for leave of absence from the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute in the event of the war ending in the autumn; alternatively a request for the lifting of the exemption from military service in force for the employees of the Institute.

MAY 13–15

On business to Karlsbad and Marienbad.

JULY 3–13

In Marienbad with Felice; Kafka reads to her "Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor." On the 13th with Felice in Franzensbad to meet Kafka's mother and his sister Valli. From there Felice

returns to Berlin; Kafka spends ten more days in Marienbad.

SEPTEMBER

Kafka encourages Felice to participate in the work of the Jewish People's Home in Berlin.

OCTOBER

"The Judgment" is published in volume 34 of Kurt Wolff's series *Der jüngste Tag.*

NOVEMBER 10–12

In Munich with Felice. On November 10, Kafka reads his story "In the Penal Colony" ("Evenings for New Writing" in the Gallery Goltz); meets Gottfried Kölwel, Max Pulver, and Eugen Mondt.

DECEMBER

From early December, Kafka spends several hours a day writing in Ottla's little house at Alchimistengässchen (Zlatá ulička) 22. "A Dream" published in the anthology *Das jüdische Prag.*

## 1917

EARLY MARCH

Apartment in the Schönborn Palace, Marktgasse (Trěžiště) 365/15.

EARLY JULY

Second engagement. Felice in Prague. Travel together via Budapest to Felice's sister in Arad. Kafka returns alone via Vienna; visits Rudolf Fuchs.

AUGUST 9–10

| | |
|---|---|
| | Hemorrhage. |
| SEPTEMBER 1 | Vacates apartment in Schönborn Palace. |
| SEPTEMBER 1 | With Max Brod to Professor Pick: tuberculosis diagnosed. |
| SEPTEMBER 12 | Moves to Ottla's in Zürau, in northwest Bohemia. |
| SEPTEMBER 20–21 | Felice in Zürau. |
| OCTOBER—NOVEMBER | "Jackals and Arabs" published in the October issue of the monthly *Der Jude*; "A Report to an Academy" in the November issue. |
| DECEMBER 25–27 | Felice in Prague; second and final breaking-off of engagement. |

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